

THE HISTORY of the CATHOLIC CHURCH IN WESTERN CANADA

BY JEROME A. G. MORICE, O.M.I.

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THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

IN

WESTERN CANADA



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REV. A. G. MORICE, O.M.I.

HISTORY
OF THE
Catholic Church
IN WESTERN CANADA

From Lake Superior to the Pacific
(1659-1895)

BY
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Au Pays de l'Ours Noir; "Notes on the
Western Dénés," etc.

With Maps and Illustrations

VOLUME I

TORONTO
THE MUSSON BOOK COMPANY, LIMITED
1910

BX 1421. M6 v. 1

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TORONTO

TO HIS GRACE
THE MOST REVEREND
L. P. ADÉLARD LANGEVIN, O.M.I., D.D.
Archbishop of St. Boniface
THIS WORK
WHICH TELLS OF THE LABOURS OF HIS
PREDECESSORS AND THEIR CO-WORKERS
IS
RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

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PREFACE

The history of the Catholic Church in Western Canada is the history of deeds of heroism, devotion to duty under the most untoward circumstances, stirring adventures and hair-breadth escapes scarcely paralleled in modern times. To improve the moral and material condition of the lowliest in the scale of humanity and gather them into the fold, missionaries bade an everlasting farewell to home and friends, and buried themselves in the snows of the North, the sombre forests of the Far West and the wind-swept prairies of the Centre or Middle West, leading there a life of sacrifice unknown to most men, but precious in the eyes of God.

The history of our Church in those boundless regions is practically that of the country itself. First in the field of discovery and exploration, Catholics long remained the only representatives of civilization there, and when people of other denominations flocked to the land of promise, the descendants of the pioneer explorers and *coureurs de bois* knew how to assert their right not only to existence in the country of their birth, but even to an adequate share of influence in the direction of its public affairs.

To mention but what applies to the territory now called Manitoba, the first governor of the colony out of which that province was evolved was a staunch

Catholic; the first missionaries of the Gospel within its boundaries were Catholics, and the first institutions of education which were ever established for the benefit of its inhabitants owed their origin to Catholic effort. Freedom from the fetters of commercial monopoly was wrenched from the then governing body by Catholics, who afterwards took an honourable part in the counsels of the incipient nation, and it is the same class of people that Manitobans must to-day thank for the constitutional liberties under which they live, or to which they can legitimately lay claim.

Even in far-off British Columbia we see Catholics acting everywhere as pioneers. The exploration of the north of that province and the appalling descent of its great fluvial artery, the torrent-like Fraser, were the work of a Catholic, seconded by a Catholic and accompanied by Catholic boatmen. The first resident whites on mainland and island were Catholics, as were also the first missionaries who took the Gospel to either part of that country. Nay, even within our own times we find that the first child born in the commercial metropolis of the Canadian Pacific, Vancouver, was the offspring of Catholics and received baptism at the hands of a Catholic priest.

From the foregoing it will be gathered that it is none too soon to put on record what the Church has done for those immense regions. Conversely, it may also be permitted to hope that, unless we have

egregiously failed in our task, our work contains elements of interest for the most different classes of people. The historian should find in it data implying a most satisfactory evolution from savagery to comparative civilization, order from practical chaos, progress and organization succeeding the most primitive stages of human society.

Apart from the satisfaction to be derived from the contemplation of such achievements and the study of the many steps that led thereto, the general reader should find in our pages sufficient items of interest to make up for such of their contents as might not appeal to his own personal tastes. In this work as in our "History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia," which found such favour with the public, it has been our aim to add readability to importance and value as a record of past events. With this end in view, we have not deemed it inconsistent with seriousness and sound criticism to occasionally enliven the relation of the deeds of the apostolic labourers in the Lord's vineyard by the introduction of details concerning minor, but more striking, incidents in their careers. The true physiognomy of a portrait, the real characteristics of a picture often result from apparently useless, yet well directed, strokes of the brush.

This consideration will explain the presence in our narrative of the somewhat elaborate accounts of, for instance, the massacre of Father Aulneau and companions; the episode of Saint-Pierre and his expe-

dient to get rid of the Assiniboine braves; the deplorable affair of Seven Oaks; the rising of the halfbreeds to avenge the assault on one of their fellows and, later on, to put an end to the exactions of the trading company; the murder of Rev. Mr. Darveau; the battle of a handful of halfbreeds against two thousand Sioux; the adventure of Bishop Grandin with the bogus Son of God, and afterwards, of the same in the midst of the Great Slave Lake blizzard; the terrible night spent by Father Lacombe with two contending war parties; the freezing of Rev. Mr. Goiffon and the consequent destruction of the St. Boniface cathedral; the untimely death of Fathers Eynard, Lamure, Hert and Chapelière, of Rev. Mr. Graton, Brother Hand and Louis Dazé; the awful fate of Brother Alexis; Father Lacombe's intervention with the Blackfeet on behalf of the Canadian Pacific Railway; the sad experience of Father Lefebvre abandoned by the Eskimos on the inhospitable shores of an Arctic river; the shooting of Rev. Mr. Brabant by a Pacific coast Indian; the episode of Chœnnih and the supposititious sack of flour; the Frog Lake massacre; the foul murder of Bishop Seghers, etc.

The lover of purely secular lore will find in our pages a reliable account of the discoveries and explorations of the French in the Canadian West; unpublished details on the establishment of the Red River Settlement and the state of the country at the time it was attempted. He will witness the dawn

and development in the centre of the North American continent of colonial institutions which culminated in the incorporation of a petty commonwealth within the new Dominion of Canada.

Above all, the English reader will be for the first time furnished with what we have endeavoured to make a dispassionate account, after unimpeachable sources of information, of the Red River Insurrection. We venture to bespeak for that part of our book the closest attention, fondly hoping that the new light thrown on those momentous events will contribute to do away with the dark legends and unfounded surmises which so many English authors have so far given as undoubted history.

The Fenian scare and the aftermath of the movement of protestation against the encroachments on the rights of the original Manitobans will likewise receive proper treatment, and even through our relation of the noble deeds of the rank and file in the Church's army on the western plains of Canada, we fancy that the reader will perceive the growth and evolution of the population, the share of the Catholics in the direction of public affairs in Manitoba and elsewhere, as well as the rôle they played in the foundation of new centres of human activities.

Finally, we flatter ourselves that even the reader with antiquarian or scientific aptitudes will welcome the autographs of the principal heroes, both lay and clerical, of our narrative, as well as the account and practical illustration of the means resorted to by the

missionaries in the religious and secular instruction of their charges.

Speaking of illustrations, we might perhaps take the liberty of pointing out two which we think deserve special mention. We refer to that which represents the famous cathedral with the “turrets twain” of the poet Whittier, now for the first time shown in its authentic garb, and the portrait of the halfbreed leader of 1869 and 1885, which is from an actual and most resembling photograph, instead of a more or less fanciful sketch intended to represent him either as he was at the time of the troubles, or when he had to conceal his identity under a disguise for the sake of personal safety.

Another point which we may mention will appeal to the people of special localities. How many Calgarians, for instance, know the origin of their beautiful city? They will find it explained in our pages. So will the inhabitants of such places as Winnipeg, St. Boniface, Regina, Prince Albert, Edmonton, St. Albert, Végreville, and Morinville find therein that of their respective localities.

Throughout the forty-three chapters of this book we have endeavoured to be as impartial as possible. We do not believe in panegyrics any more than in persistent vituperation. Likewise, we realize that uniform success in things mundane is very far from common. When it is a question of human deeds, even though they be undertaken for the greater glory of God, failures are not unknown. These but too

often follow successes; but they serve only to accentuate the merit of the latter.

On the other hand, because our aim has been to give each one his due, we sincerely wish we had not met in our way a certain class of people, whose doings and sayings could not possibly be passed over without a word of blame. For this reason some non-Catholics will probably be tempted to see traces of sectarian animus in our strictures on the same, in spite of the very character given those who were responsible therefor by their own co-religionists, as will appear in the following pages. We prefer truth, even when accompanied by the apprehension of such criticism, to condoning words and deeds which do not conform to received professional ethics. Moreover, far from seeking out the occasions of animadverting on antagonists in the missionary field, we have avoided them as much as possible, consistent with the exposition of our own men's labours. When some mention of the former was unavoidable, we have striven to be as discreet as we could with the wealth of information at our command.

But we should like it to be distinctly understood that the prime merit of the present work, if it has any, must lie in the originality of its contents. It is a first-hand book written after hitherto unknown, or at least unutilized, sources of information, not a rehash of matter already published by various authors. Even in connection with historical questions which have been treated by specialists, such as

the French origins of the Middle West, we have made it a point to go for our authorities to the very first sources, Lavérendrye's manuscript letters, memoirs and journals, as well as those of Governor de Beauharnois, Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, etc.

For our account of the foundation of Lord Selkirk's Settlement we have carefully perused the voluminous correspondence of that truly great man, as well as that of his lieutenant, Miles Macdonell, and others. With regard to the permanent establishment and the history of the first thirty years of the Church in the Canadian West, we have based our entire narrative on the originals of the letters exchanged between the Bishops of Quebec and their representative and clergy on the western plains. The official publication of the Oblate Order—which does not circulate outside of its various posts and, on that account, is as little known to the general reader as any manuscript in the dust of an old library—has furnished us with most of our data concerning the labours of its members within the territory embraced by our book.

These are all primary, or first-hand, sources of information. Apart therefrom, we have occasionally had recourse to such secondary works of reference as the more or less complete histories of Manitoba, the West and British Columbia by Ross, Gunn and Tuttle, Hargrave, Hill, Begg, Bryce, Dugas and ourself, without neglecting books and pamphlets of more limited scope, or of only¹ partially historical char-

acter, as Dom Benoît's monumental *Vie de Mgr. Taché*, the latter's invaluable *Vingt Années de Missions*, and the works or compilations of Masson, Ross Cox, Southesk, Milton and Cheadle, Mayne, Macfie, W. Pike, Petitot, Prud'homme, Laut and perhaps a score of others.

For the political troubles of 1869 and 1885 our authorities have been most abundant. The reader will often be referred thereto through the copious footnotes that accompany the chapters bearing on those subjects.

We are the happy possessor of all the printed documents we have made use of. But it stands to reason that the numerous manuscripts we have examined while preparing this History are out of the reach of profane eyes. We have, however, found no uncompromising Cerberi guarding them, but, on the contrary, most obliging gentlemen ever ready to allow of a good long peep at their treasures. It is therefore our agreeable duty to publicly thank in this connection Rev. Dr. L. St.-Geo. Lindsay, the keeper at Quebec of the most precious collection of manuscripts north of Mexico, if not in the whole of America; Father A. E. Jones, S.J., the learned archivist of the Jesuits in Montreal; Drs. Doughty and Roy, respectively the head and assistant of the Department of the Archives at Ottawa, as well as Dr. Jos. Prud'homme who, at the bidding of Most Rev. L. P. A. Langevin, O.M.I., has let us have free access to the valuable documents in his keeping at St. Boniface.

Others, too numerous to mention, have likewise lent their valued aid by furnishing us with replies to occasional queries concerning points within their personal competence. Very Rev. H. Leduc, O.M.I., Vicar-General of St. Albert, deserves in this connection the special thanks of the author. Last, not least, we beg to acknowledge our many obligations for favours conferred by our worthy archbishop, who, in conjunction with our kindly provincial, the Very Rev. Prisque Magnan, has encouraged us by word and deed while engaged in the preparation of this work, which may God bless and prosper, for whose glory and honour it was undertaken!

WINNIPEG, October 9, 1909.

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CATHOLIC CHURCH IN WESTERN CANADA

PART I

First Origins in Middle West

CHAPTER I.

THE PEOPLE AND THE FUR TRADE.

1659-1727.

Three hundred years ago the vast region between Lake Superior and the Rocky Mountains was indeed a lone, silent land. Neither the sombre forests to the east of Red River, nor the boundless prairies to the west of that stream knew aught of what we now complacently call civilization. Here and there only hordes of unsophisticated Indians, numerous in comparison to what they are now, though by no means commensurate in numbers to the expanse of land over which they roamed, alone disputed with the bouncing buffalo the free possession of the soil.

South of Churchill River, on the one hand, and the north branch of the Saskatchewan, on the other, these were divided into four principal tribes, which could be reduced to two ethnic families. From Sault

Sainte Marie to the Lake of the Woods, the Chipeways or Sauteux (from the name of their main seat) held sway, to the number of at least 35,000, and peopled after a way the rocky shores of the lakes and the dark retreats of the woods.

North and south of the present boundary line, their immediate neighbours and congeners in the west were the Crees or Christinaux, as the French originally called them, after one of their bands. This was a powerful tribe, active and energetic, which ranged over the territory south of Churchill River, from the Lake of the Woods and Hudson Bay, in the east, almost to the Rocky Mountains, in the west, where they met their hereditary foes, the famous Blackfeet, a warlike division of the same Algonquin race which was as essentially a plains tribe as the Crees were originally denizens of the woods.

The former at first dwelt along the Saskatchewan, numbering some 20,000 souls; but, at the time of which we write, they had just been driven to the southwest, and now occupied the region extending from slightly north of the Bow River to the upper Missouri and beyond. This result had been accomplished by an alliance of the Crees with a branch of the Sioux at first called Assiniboels, and now better known as Assiniboinies, "those that cook by means of stones." Having become dissatisfied with their brethren of the great American plains, those aborigines moved north, and were vouchsafed a gen-

erous hospitality by the Crees, who made room for them, at first between Lakes Winnipeg and Manitoba and the basin of the river to which they gave their name; after which they gradually drifted towards the headwaters of that stream and its tributaries.

At the time of their separation from the main stock, the Assiniboines may have been 14,000 or 15,000 strong, while the Crees boasted probably over three times that number.¹ In common with the latter they were constantly at war, not only with the Blackfeet, but even and mostly with their own blood relatives, the Sioux, who from time immemorial had likewise endured the enmity of the Chippeways of the east.

North of these important tribes ranged the numberless bands of the great Déné race, of which further mention shall be made later on.

All the tribes of the Middle West agreed more or less in their sociology and religion. When fully dressed—a rare occurrence for the men in summer—they wore in the guise of a cloak the skin of the buf-

¹The Crees are now about 15,000. Yet, writing in 1797, a fur trader by the name of John Macdonell stated that “owing to their wars with their neighbours, the smallpox of 1780-81, and other misfortunes, the third of the nation does not now remain” (in Masson’s “*Les Bourgeois du Nord-Ouest*,” vol. I., p. 277). Considering that civilization has not, as a rule, increased the native population, this would give 45,000, and more, as the correct figure to represent the number of Crees even as late as 1780. But it is known that another visitation of the plague in 1838 swept off at least half of the prairie tribes. From this it would seem that 50,000 would be a very moderate figure for that tribe previous to the advent of the whites. It is commonly divided into the Crees proper (of whom there are the prairie and the wood branches), the Muskegongs, and the Monsonis.

falo, on the flesh of which mostly they subsisted, while leggings and moccasins of the same material, or of some other skin, sometimes in conjunction with a shirt-like piece of apparel worn with the hair on, completed their costume. During the warm season the men quite often contented themselves with the breech-clout and moccasins, while the women wore a short petticoat, always of skin, fastened to the waist by means of a leather belt.

They dwelt in skin tepees, conical lodges mounted on poles, the lightness of which allowed of easy displacement, and, besides the meat of the buffalo, which were then to be found in immense herds, they lived on fish, a species of wild rice, and berries, according to the season.

No tribe was noted for the purity of its morals or the honesty of its code, and polygamy was general, while a temporary exchange of wives was often considered the greatest token of friendshiip. Hence woman's lot was generally very wretched, and divorce was a common occurrence.

Though to the Blackfeet of the Far West *Natus*, or the Sun, would seem to have been the supreme Deity, from the yearly festivities celebrated in his honour, celebrations which had a counterpart in the thirst-dance of the Crees, *Kichi-Manitou*, or the Great Spirit,² was very generally, at least at the time of the discovery of their country, regarded as the

²Several English authors wrqngly translate this expression: the Master of Life.



AN INDIAN OF THE CANADIAN PLAINS.

Master of Life, who created the world and all that is good in it, while evil and the miseries to which human flesh is heir were attributed to the opposite principle, *Machi-Manitou*, or the Bad Spirit.

The Bad Spirit had to be propitiated by incantations, the ministers of which were supernaturally endowed shamans, or medicine-men, whose dancing and insufflations were accompanied by vociferous singing and the beating of drums. The Great Spirit was honoured by periodical celebrations, when the chiefs or the old men thanked him publicly for past favours to the tribe, and implored his assistance against their enemies. After some sacred chanting, the feast was crowned by a banquet and several rounds of smoking, in the course of which the stem of the pipe was first inclined to the south, the home of the Deity, then successively toward the earth, the rising sun, and the west.

This was the only collective worship known to them, and it was not frequent. Individuals preferred addressing their homage to the Evil One, because he alone was supposed to be disposed to do harm. In such cases a dog would be sacrificed, or pieces of personal property, part of the hunt or any valuable object, were offered up by being left on scaffolds, out of the reach of the wild beasts.

This aboriginal population was thus spinning out its simple life in alternate spells of peace and war—which, in the latter case, meant ambuscades and massacres of the weak by the strong—perfectly uncon-

scious of other worlds beyond the "Great Lake," and of the blessings the Redeemer had brought them, when it gradually dawned upon them that, in the far south, people hailing from distant lands, pale-faced and bearded, had made their appearance, who had at their disposal wonderful fabrics and terrible weapons.

Some of these foreigners were soon to pass through their own country in the persons of two French adventurers, Pierre Esprit Radisson and Ménart Chouart, Sieur Desgroseillers. The former was a native of Paris,³ and was born in 1636, while the latter came from Charly-Saint-Cyr, near Meaux, where he first saw the light of day about 1621. Desgroseillers having married Radisson's sister, the two Frenchmen became bound by family ties which, added to a similarity of inclinations, prepared them for the wonderful career which was to be theirs.

Both have been represented as Protestants by Dr. George Bryce⁴ and others, and, while disclaiming for Desgroseillers any such affiliation, even Abbé George Dugas declares that "it cannot be doubted that Radisson was a Huguenot."⁵ Yet both adventurers were Catholics. Desgroseillers passed his early

³He lived a long time at Saint Malo, hence probably the *lapsus calami* of A. C. Laut, who states ("Pathfinders of the West," p. 6. Toronto, 1904) that he was born there.

⁴"The Remarkable History of the Hudson's Bay Company," p. 3. Toronto, 1900.

⁵*L'Ouest Canadien*, p. 22. Montreal, 1896. Such is also the opinion of Father Lewis Drummond, S.J. ("The French Element in the Canadian Northwest," p. 2. Winnipeg, 1887).

youth with the Ursulines of Quebec, and Mother of the Incarnation speaks of him in the highest terms. Later on he became a sort of lay brother, giving his time and work to the Jesuit missions. Furthermore, when grown up and in the midst of his peregrinations, it is on record that he one day exhibited to the gaze of wondering Indians a picture of the Flight into Egypt, which he would scarcely have kept had he been a Protestant. But an irrefutable proof of his Catholicity rests on the fact that his name is found in the registers of Three Rivers as godfather to several children.

As to Radisson, he commences his journal with the well-known formula “To the Greater Glory of God,”⁶ which of itself betrays his familiarity with the Jesuits, who are known to have favoured him both with useful advice and with pecuniary assistance. Here is what he writes in his memoirs concerning these much maligned missionaries: “Their only desire is the coming of the kingdom of God. They give evidence of a truly admirable charity towards all who work and show themselves worthy of help by their honest conduct. This is the mere truth. It is the answer I give to all those who would ever pretend to the contrary. I speak here from personal knowledge.”⁷

If we consider that this is from a private document

⁶The motto of the Jesuit Order.

⁷Quoted from L. A. Prud’homme, *Notes Historiques sur la Vie de P. E. Radisson*, pp. 27-28.

which was not to be published during the lifetime of its author, and from which, therefore, he could expect no earthly returns, it will be easy to decide whether Radisson was or not a Protestant. Moreover, as Miss Agnes C. Laut observes,⁸ he admits having gone to confession to the Jesuit Father Poncet. This alone ought to decide the question.

However, we may as well admit that he was not the soul of honour, nor were scruples much in his way when it was a question of attaining his ends. Twice traitor to his own country, he does not seem to have been much more sensible to the requirements of truth with regard to his travels than to the necessity of a dutiful allegiance to the land of his birth. His journal, besides being so vague in its topographical details, contains statements which scarcely command belief, as when he mentions, for instance, having one day met a pack of three hundred bears!⁹ Another time, having reached a lake in the vicinity of James Bay, he would make us believe that, with Desgroseillers, he had killed six hundred moose.¹⁰ Hence no wonder if some of his other computations smack of exaggeration. For instance, it is hard to believe him when he speaks of a village near Lake Superior that contained "more than seven thousand warriors,"¹¹ that is, at least, twenty thousand souls.

⁸"Pathfinders of the West," p. 41.

⁹In Prud'homme's *Notes Historiques*, p. 19.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 31.

Be this as it may, it appears that the two Frenchmen were the first visitors to the land of the Crees, wherever they may have met them. This was in 1659-60. Leaving the shores of one of the great lakes¹² in company with twenty-seven fellow countrymen, they pushed to the southwest, going possibly as far as the upper Mississippi, and returned to the north by way of the territory of the Crees. More than this we cannot say with any degree of certainty.

This voyage of the two friends was that of adventurers and *coureurs de bois* rather than of explorers. It left no traces behind, neither did it enlighten the civilized world on the nature of the country and people they had visited. Therein does not lie Radisson's claim to immortality; we must seek it elsewhere.

Displeased at the treatment he had received at the hands of the French authorities, he turned to the English for assistance, and told them of the fabulous amount of valuable furs they could get if brought into contact with the tribes of the great Canadian plains. His intrigues caused in course of time the formation of a trading association which was destined thenceforth to have on that immense region the most lasting influence. We mean "the Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson Bay," commonly called the Hudson's Bay Company.

This was at first composed of Prince Rupert, the

¹²Which Radisson calls Lake of the Hurons.

Duke of Albemarle, General Monck, and fifteen other noblemen or merchants, who were granted by Charles II. a charter embodying such vast powers that, in after years, its validity was more than once contested. This comprehensive document gave the Company "the whole trade of all those seas, streights, and bays, rivers, lakes, creeks, and sounds, in whatever latitude they shall be, that lie within the entrance of the streights commonly called Hudson's Streights, together with all the lands, countries, and territories upon the coasts and confines of the seas, streights, bays, lakes, rivers, creeks, and sounds aforesaid, which are not now actually possessed by any of our subjects, or by the subjects of any other Christian prince or State."

This was generous indeed. But some there are who, remembering the axiom "nobody giveth what he possesseth not," may find this liberality of a cheap kind, since never before had an English monarch claimed as his what, on the 2nd of May, 1670, Charles II. so kindly bestowed on his kinsman and future associates in the fur trade.

These, however, lost no time in improving their opportunities. Thenceforth ships would leave the Thames for the frozen shores of Hudson Bay, laden with muskets and ammunition, axes and hatchets, knives and kettles, together with tobacco and spirits, ready-made coats and various fabrics, which they disposed of, at an enormous profit, to the natives who soon hurried thither. In return they received

from their dusky customers the choicest peltries of what is now the Middle West of Canada.

The English traders established posts at Albany and Moose rivers, and then at Rupert River, Port Nelson and New Severn, calling Rupert's Land after their patron the region tributary to Hudson Bay. These forts, quite primitive at first, were gradually enlarged, until some of them became worthy of their name. Nay, one of them, Prince of Wales' Fort, at the mouth of the Churchill River, was built of stone in the form of a large quadrilateral with regular bastions, and boasted the possession of numerous cannon.

But the French, who claimed priority of discovery, could not help seeing these establishments in the light of an intrusion upon their rights. Several times did they capture some of them from their owners, after daring exploits by the Chevalier De Troyes, D'Iberville, and La Pérouse, which cannot but excite genuine admiration. However, these had to be returned, or were retaken, and political complications in Europe finally confirmed the English in the possession of the same.

Hence the energies of the French were, from that time on, bent towards diverting from English channels all they could of the spoils of the woods and prairies.

Another motive for the extension of their activities towards the west lay in the fact that, after many fruitless attempts at discovering a passage to Asia

through Hudson Bay and the north of America, the directing minds of the time had become convinced that this was to be sought overland, instead of by an imaginary water route the existence of which some still persisted in affirming, but which nobody could find.

Useless to remark that geography was still in the dark as to the North Pacific coast. It was known that there was a sea beyond the American continent as far north as 43° and what was then called the Strait of Avian, after which it was supposed there was a Gulf of Love (*Golfe d'Amour*), followed by an isthmus which united the land called "Bourbonia," in the southeast, to the steppes of Tartary, in the northwest. In April, 1718, a priest of the Congregation of the Mission,¹³ Father Bobé, wrote a most learned dissertation embodying all that was known or conjectured at the time concerning the geography and ethnology of that part of the world, not omitting to submit that it was through the above mentioned isthmus that Tartars and a few Israelites had crossed into America. The ponderous document ended by declaring that the discovery of the Sea of the West would be glorious for the King, useful to France, and meritorious in the eyes of God.¹⁴

As a practical result of this and previous agita-

¹³Or Lazarist, not "one of the Jesuit missionaries of New France," as Mr. Lawrence J. Burpee has it, p. 195 of his "Search for the Western Sea."

¹⁴*Mémoire pour la Découverte de la Mer de l'Ouest*, in Canadian Archives, Ottawa.

tions on the subject, it was decided that a preliminary step should be the founding of three posts, one of which it was resolved to establish on Lake Superior, the other on the Lake of the Christinaux (Lake of the Woods), and the third on that of the Assiniboels (Lake Winnipeg).

In furtherance of this plan Zacharie Robutel de la Noue, a French Canadian who had fought in 1680 against the English of Hudson Bay, left Montreal in July, 1717, and built a house at Kaministiquia, on Lake Superior, which was to be the embryo of the far-famed Fort William of later years. He even tried to push on to Lac la Pluie, or Rainy Lake; but the hostility of the Sioux prevented him from accomplishing his end. So that, as he confined his exertions to Kaministiquia,¹⁵ he was replaced in 1721 by a Captain Deschaillons de Saint-Ours, who did not venture any farther west and was himself removed four years later.

Meantime, other counsels had prevailed. The discovery of the Western Sea, which was uppermost in the thoughts of the authorities at Paris and Quebec, was to be attempted by way of the territory of the Sioux. With this end in view, the celebrated Father de Charlevoix was sent to reconnoitre, and, as a

¹⁵It might be remarked here that a Mr. de Noyon was credited with having reached the Lake of the Woods as early as 1688, as appears from a passage in a memoir by Michel Bégon, dated 17th Nov., 1716: “The Assiniboile Indians wanted to take to the Western Sea De Noyon, voyageur, twenty-eight years ago; he then wintered at the entrance of the Lake of the Cristinaux, on the Ouchichiq River, which leads to the Lake of the Assiniboiles, and hence to the Western Sea.”

result of his report, though against the dictates of his better judgment, a mission was established among the Indians on Lake Pépin (1727). Those terrible lords of the American plains had just massacred some Frenchmen on their way to Louisiana, and it was deemed expedient to pacify and civilize them to some extent before parties could pass through their lands with any degree of security. And as the fur trade was by no means superseded by the craving for geographical discoveries, or the interests of religion, a company was at the same time formed whose operations were to be carried on side by side with the efforts of the missionaries.

This gave birth to Fort Beauharnois, on Lake Pépin, an expansion of the Mississippi in what is now Wisconsin and Minnesota. This establishment soon numbered ninety-five lodges of Indians within the shadow of its walls. Yet all these arrangements were to come to naught, for reasons which we shall have to expose further on.

CHAPTER II.

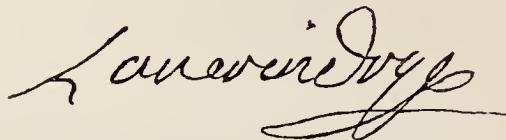
HERALDS OF THE CROSS.

1727-1736.

The right man for such a perilous undertaking as the discovery of the Far West had not so far been tested out. Such a one was now at hand in the person of a noble-minded Canadian who had embraced the career of a fur trader more as a matter of necessity than out of a personal inclination. His name was Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, and he had assumed the surname of De la Vérendrye (which he generally shortened to Lavérendrye) by which he is known in history. Born at Three Rivers, November 17, 1685, of a French gentleman, René Gaultier, Chevalier de Varennes, and of a young Canadian lady, Marie, daughter of Pierre Boucher, the first of the celebrated family of that name, Pierre Gaultier, had served in the French army and been left for dead on the battlefield of Malplaquet, after having received nine wounds.

Yet the reward for his devotion to the French Crown had consisted merely in an empty title, and, in common with other Canadian nobles, he had practically been forced to turn to the fur trade as a means of subsistence. Endowed with a tireless energy, a rectitude of mind and honesty of purpose

hardly common at the time among the upper classes of Canada, and, above all, possessed of strong religious convictions, Lavérendrye was indeed an ideal

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lavérendrye". The signature is fluid and somewhat stylized, with a large, sweeping initial 'L'.

LAVERENDRYE'S SIGNATURE.

man for the pursuance of the projects of the French Court and its representatives on the banks of the St. Lawrence.

In 1727, being stationed at Lake Nepigon, he had heard through the Indians of a way to the Western Sea, and had in consequence formed a plan which he submitted to the French governor, Charles de Beauharnois, through Father Nicolas Degonnor, S.J., one of the missionaries of the west.¹ This priest having gone to Montreal, he pleaded the cause of Lavérendrye who, in 1730, was in charge of Fort Kaministiquia. The result of his intervention was that on the 8th of June of the following year the latter left Montreal for the unknown West, at the head of fifty men, and accompanied by three of his sons and his nephew, Christopher Dufrost de la Jemmeraye.

¹Father Degonnor (whose name is usually spelt De Gonnor) was born in the diocese of Luçon, France, 19th Nov., 1691 (some say 1671), and had entered the Order at Bordeaux Sept. 11th, 1710, reaching Canada in 1725. He died at Quebec 16th Dec., 1759.

Unable to obtain any funds from the Court to defray his expenses, he had, instead, been granted the monopoly of the fur trade throughout the countries he was to discover, a privilege which was expected, quite wrongly as we shall see, to advantageously make up for any monetary grant then in the power of the Paris authorities to offer. This circumstance, however, made rapid progress impossible, though it contributed towards Lavérendrye coming in contact with the aborigines of the west, and acquiring an effective influence over them.

On his way west Lavérendrye took as chaplain to the expedition Father Charles Michel Mesaiger, a Jesuit born in France, March 7, 1706, who had

Charles Michel Mesaiger S.J.

FATHER MESAIGER'S SIGNATURE.

arrived in Quebec in the course of 1722.² Father Mesaiger was the first priest to see the Lake of the Woods.

But, long before he could get there, Lavérendrye was to have a foretaste of the many unpleasantnesses that were to be his lot in the course of his explorations. On August 27th, when fifteen leagues to the southwest of Kaministiquia, on Lake Super-

²Feb. 2nd, 1726, he pronounced his four vows and was sent to the Miami Indians. He returned to France Oct. 20th, 1749, and died at Rouen 7th Aug., 1766. His numerous letters, still extant, stamp him as a most evenly balanced, and even jovial, man.

ior, his crew, terrified at the prospect of a nine-mile portage, and perhaps also under the influence of the evil counsels of envious traders, refused to go farther. But, writes the explorer, "with the aid of our missionary father, I found the means of coaxing some of my employees into going with my nephew La Jemmeraye, who was my lieutenant, and my son to establish the post of Lac la Pluie."³

With these men of good will he equipped four canoes, and thus was Fort Saint Pierre founded, at the outlet of the lake, some time before the winter of 1731, while the leader of the whole expedition had to return and winter at Kaministiquia. During his stay there, La Jemmeraye was not idle at Fort St. Pierre. He invited the Indians he met to barter their pelts with him. Unfortunately the arrival of the French having become known only to a limited number, trade at the new post could not have been very brisk.

On June 8th of the following year (1732) Lavérendrye set out again with the missionary, his nephew, who had joined him again, two of his children and seven men in canoes. After having been entertained by a large crowd of natives at Fort St. Pierre, Rainy Lake, the little troop pushed on as far as the Lake of the Woods, on the west side of which they erected Fort St. Charles, so named after

³In Pierre Margry's *Mémoires et Documents pour servir à l'Histoire des Origines Françaises des Pays d'Outre-Mer*, vol. VI., p. 586. Paris, 1888.

the patron saint of the chaplain as well as of the Governor of New France.

Speaking of the latter, a memoir he addressed to the Minister of the Colonies in Paris initiates us into the misgivings, based on a quite excusable ignorance, which were then common, as well as to the real object which the French Government had in view by furthering the contemplated discoveries. Beauharnois had thus written concerning Lavérendrye and his undertaking.

“He must also have very accurate maps of New Mexico and California, so that he may not go and throw himself into the *Mer Vermeille*, [Gulf of Mexico] whereinto the Red River of which he speaks has all the appearances of disengaging itself. . . . To these considerations I add one which will no doubt be of great weight with a minister who has, like you, so much at heart the preaching of the Gospel to numerous nations who have not yet heard of Jesus-Christ. It is that, on the way, it shall be possible to take measures to prepare throughout these vast regions establishments equally useful to religion and to the State. Nay, it would be difficult for a friar to pass three or four years travelling through these countries without finding occasions of procuring by baptism an entrance into heaven to several children in danger of death.”

Then, coming to his own experience, the pious governor adds: “I have several times had this con-

solation in the course of my career, and none is more flattering for persons of my condition.'"⁴

No contemporary document is known to establish the fact that others than the French Canadian gentlemen and voyageurs were vouchsafed the ministrations of the early Jesuit missionaries at Fort St. Charles or elsewhere in the west. But it is inconceivable that, with the large numbers of Indians who constantly pressed on their footsteps, none should have been baptized. Nay, the late discovery of the remains of three Indians who had been buried within the fort, alongside of Canadians, clearly proves that some of them had received the sacrament that gives a right to Christian sepulture.

Fort St. Charles was a long square, of which one side was one hundred feet long, built of a double line of pickets some fifteen feet high and so planted in the ground that one of them stood up against the junction of two others. Inside of this enclosure were to be found a church, a house for the chaplain and another for the commander, as well as four cabins with chimneys for the men, a store and powder house, all of which were built of logs and clay, and covered with bark.⁵ Lavérendrye states explicitly that he adopted the site pointed out by Father Mesaiger, who based his preferences on the abundance of fish and game.

⁴Unsigned and undated contemporary document in the Canadian Archives, Ottawa.

⁵Beauharnois, 28th Sept., 1733; also letter from Father Aulneau to Father Bonin ("The Aulneau Collection," p. 72).

This foundation took place in the autumn of 1732. The lack of provisions for so many men precluded the possibility of going farther. In the following spring, the explorer sent his nephew to Montreal, to report on the progress of his expedition. Father Mesaiger, whose health was unsatisfactory, returned with him.

On September 27th, the canoes that had been despatched to Michillimakinac, at the western end of Lake Huron, for provisions and merchandise, came up. It was soon discovered that the goods they brought were ill-assorted and of little use for the fur trade. Yet as both the Crees and the Assiniboines of Lake Winnipeg were clamouring for a trading post nearer home, Lavérendrye established one, in the fall of 1734, at the mouth of Winnipeg River, which he called Maurepas, after the French Minister of Colonies who had scarcely done anything for him.

His eldest son, Jean-Baptiste, superintended the erection of that fort. As to the leader of the expedition, pressed by heavy debts and consequent difficulties with his men and his outfitters, he felt it necessary to repair to Montreal, which he reached August 25, 1734. He had then to his debit as much as 43,000 livres, or French pounds. To satisfy his creditors he had no assets but the expectation of the numerous packs of furs which he anticipated as the natural outcome of his discoveries. So far his three posts had yielded but 600 packs.⁶

⁶Beauharnois to the French Minister.

He went as far as Quebec, and had to lease for five years his establishments to his creditors, with the right to exploit them by means of agents, while he, free of all business interests, would devote all his energies to further the discovery of the West. At the time that he was thus sacrificing himself, his youngest son, a lad of eighteen, named Louis Joseph, was at Quebec preparing himself by serious study for the task of mapping out the country where he was to join the exploring expedition.

Then, to replace Father Mesaiger, who could not return, Father Jean Pierre Aulneau de la Touche, S.J., was ordered to go west.⁷ His ultimate mission was the evangelization of the Mandans of the upper Missouri, who from their quasi-sedentary habits were believed to be more amenable to Christian ideals and civilized ways than the nomadic hordes of the Canadian plains.

Born in France, April 25 (or 21), 1705, at Mou-

⁷Father Aulneau's name has been written in many ways, Arnaud having, down to a comparatively recent date, been the commonly accepted spelling of the same. Father Petitot (*En route pour la Mer Glaciale*, pp. 192-23). Paris, 1877) contends that it should be Arneau, and quotes in support of his assertion from an old document which he says exists at York Factory, on Hudson Bay. There, he adds, is also to be found a breviary printed at Rouen in 1701, with the name Arneau written on the first leaf, and, underneath, references to Rouen, 1705, and Paris, 1698, together with such phrases in French as . . . "on the north coast of Lake Superior, 1729. All the Indians love me, and repose great trust in me . . . the winter of 1728 very long and severe . . . P. F. Arneau, Rouen."

From the particular mode of death which he attributes to the Father Arneau of the Fort York manuscript, it is plain that Petitot does refer to the second Jesuit companion of Lavérendrye. But the very phrases and dates we have reproduced after him make it as evident that that Father Arneau was an entirely different man. The autograph of Father Aulneau, of Fort St. Charles, will settle the question as to the correct spelling of his name.

tiers-sur-Lay, Vendée, of a good family which gave to the Church two other priests and one nun, Father Aulneau had been admitted into the Society of Jesus, December 12, 1720, and, having left La Rochelle, May 29, 1734, he had arrived in Canada August 12th of the same year, after having won golden opinions for his devotedness to the victims of the plague which had broken out on board his ship.

Eager for the conversion of souls, the young missionary wrote from Quebec, April 25, 1735, of the plans he should follow out once arrived in the west. He intended to winter among the "Assiniboels" and the "Christinaux"; then make for the land of the "Ouant Chipouanes," that is, he adds, "those who dwell in holes," and he rejoiced in the thought that "if our good God so will it . . . I shall be the first to bear to them the tidings of the Gospel."⁸

God, in His inscrutable designs, had ordered otherwise. Father Aulneau left Montreal for the west with Lavérendrye on June 13, 1735, happy and contented, though his joy was incomplete for the lack of a priestly confrère to accompany him.⁹ Blessed with a delicate conscience, he scarcely relished the idea of being deprived so long of those consolations of religion which he was himself to confer on others. These scruples were ultimately to seal his fate.

⁸Letter to Father H. Faye, 25th April, 1735 ("The Aulneau Collection," p. 34. Montreal, 1893).

⁹Father Aulneau to his mother, 29th April, 1735 (*Ibid.*, p. 45).

Meantime the explorer's troubles were not at an end. The canoes loaded with his provisions having failed to arrive in time, the winter was passed at Fort St. Charles in economizing, though he had previously sent to Fort Maurepas his nephew La Jemmeraye, two of his sons and as many employees.

As to our missionary, he was acquiring scraps of the Cree language, much against the will of the Indians themselves, who did not appreciate the gift of God. In a letter to Father Bonin, of Michillimakinac, he frankly admitted that he built no hopes on those who traded at Fort St. Charles, since, in addition to their superstitions and depraved natures, the curse of strong drink had put them almost beyond the pale of redemption. "Both English and French, by their accursed avarice, have given them an appetite for brandy," writes the young priest, who shortly after feels in duty bound to add: "I must, however, say in justice to the French with whom I have journeyed that they have not mingled in this infamous traffic, and that, in spite of all the reiterated demands of the Indians, they have preferred to ignore all offers of barter from the tribes to giving them brandy in exchange."¹⁰

To those who know the lengths to which all subsequent traders found it necessary to go in this matter, the remarks of Father Aulneau add to Lavérendrye's memory a halo of uprightness sufficient in

¹⁰The same to Father Bonin, 30th April, 1736 (*Ibid.*, p. 75).

itself to stamp him as an exceptionally conscientious man.

In the spring of 1736 provisions were at a premium at Fort St. Charles. To cap the commander's misfortunes, he was startled on June 4th¹¹ by the news of the death of his nephew, which the starving little party at Fort Maurepas brought him. La Jemmeraye had expired May 10, 1736. He was the first Christian buried within what is now Manitoba. His cousins erected a wooden cross over his grave, and left for Fort St. Charles.

Embarrassed by the lack of provisions which this accession to his personnel rendered still more pressing, Lavérendrye was obliged to dispatch three canoes to Michillimakinac, his nearest base of operations. This was for Father Aulneau too good an opportunity to revisit his brother priests, and profit by their ministrations, to be neglected. He immediately made up his mind to embark with the men, and begged for the company of the explorer's eldest son, Jean-Baptiste, which Lavérendrye could not refuse him. They left on June 8, 1736, in canoes manned by nineteen¹² voyageurs, following in the

¹¹L. A. Prud'homme says June 2nd (*Pierre Gaultier de la Vérendrye, in Mémoires de la Société Royale du Canada*, p. 32); but the discoverer is explicit on this point; he mentions the 4th (see Margry, vol. VI., p. 589). Beauharnois must likewise have been mistaken when he said the 5th (Letter to the Minister, 14th Oct., 1736).

¹²Contemporary documents are not quite agreed on the number of voyageurs in the party. Some say eighteen, others twenty, most of them have it nineteen, and one puts at twenty-four the entire force. The discoveries of the site of Fort St. Charles make it clear that, besides the priest and the gentleman, there must have been nineteen employees.

wake of five other French employees, who had left for the same destination on the third of the same month.

Innocent of any reprehensible intentions and little knowing as yet the treachery of the plains Indians, they did not dream of any danger as they paddled over the island-studded waters of the Lake of the Woods. Yet the commander had advised them to be cautious. They might also have remembered a recent occurrence, insignificant in itself, though fraught with most serious possibilities. A small party of Crees, the inveterate foes of the Sioux, proud in the possession of a few guns obtained at the fort, had been firing from its stockade on some of the prairie Sioux passing by.

"Who fire on us?" inquired the southerners.

"The French," jeered the Crees.

Fatal words, dictated by cowardice, what unforeseen consequences they were to have! The party of five that preceded that of Jean-Baptiste Lavérendrye and Father Aulneau had not gone far when, on the 4th of June, they came in sight of thirty canoes manned by ninety or a hundred Sioux warriors, who at once surrounded them, and tied them up preparatory to torturing them.

"Revenge!" they cried. "These shall pay for the attack on our people at the white men's house."

"But neither we nor our friends ever did you any harm," pleaded Bourassa, one of the voyageurs.

"The French fired on the Sioux," declared the painted warriors.

"You are mistaken," replied Bourassa, "it was the Crees that did so. If you want to make sure of the truth of my words, and must avenge the insult done your nation, go to our fort. There you will find five or six tepees of Crees, the guilty party."

So spoke the poor voyageur, in his name and in that of his companions. Yet the Sioux were but half appeased.

"The French favour our enemies," they objected. "They sell them arms and ammunition and the son of their commander has been made the chief of the Crees."

"I know nothing of this; but you must be aware that you get yourselves at the fort all the arms you can pay for, when we have them. Besides, I have many a time heard the commander of the whites preach peace to the Crees and others."

Just then a slave woman rushed out crying:

"What would you do, my relations? I owe my life to this Frenchman. He did me nothing but good."

This intervention, joined to the prospect of a more worthy prey, made the Sioux relent. They released Bourassa and his companions, but not before they had appropriated their arms and plundered their stores. Then they made for the fort, where, how-

ever, they failed to find the wigwams of the Crees, who had moved off after Bourassa's departure.¹³

Unable to wreak their revenge on their hated foes, the Sioux retraced their steps, their thirst for vengeance whetted by disappointment, and probably intending to fall on the voyageurs by whom they thought they had been wilfully deceived. Bourassa and companions had promised to wait for their return, with the understanding that they were then to receive back their arms; but they had, instead, hurried to Michillimakinac.

The blood-thirsty savages found something better. On an island about twenty miles south of Fort St. Charles, they espied the fire of a large party, which they soon identified as containing Jean-Baptiste de Lavérendrye, the adopted chief of their enemies. It is likely that, blinded by the glare of the flames to what was transpiring on the water, the French were taken unawares. In an instant, arrows,¹⁴ tomahawks, daggers and even the working tools of the

¹³These details are taken from two sources: MSS. documents (vol. XVI., fol. 189) in the Paris Colonial Archives of the Marine, and the Report of Governor de Beauharnois, dated Quebec, 14th Oct., 1736. The latter, written apparently just after the first news of the occurrence had transpired, does not seem accurate in every particular. Thus, it says that "the prairie Sioux, to the number of 130, found Father Aulneau's canoe manned by a certain Bourassa," and ascribes the Frenchmen's liberation solely to the intervention of a squaw, who told the Indians to go on and they would find 24 Frenchmen to destroy. How that woman could know of Father Aulneau's party, who left only four days after the Sioux's encounter with Bourassa, is not clear. It was, moreover, impossible for the savages to meet Father Aulneau's party on their way to the fort. They must have found it on their way back, perhaps after having followed it at a distance ever since its departure.

¹⁴At least one, of iron, has lately been found stuck in the skull of a voyageur unearthed at Fort St. Charles.

camping party were set at work. The whites were killed to the last man, but not before the Sioux had experienced the courage of their victims, if we are to judge by the fact that, ten days afterwards, two Monsoni Crees found over twenty Sioux canoes still besmeared with blood, and, near by, human limbs buried in the sand. The identity of these craft was certain; side by side with the Sioux canoes were two that belonged to the French.¹⁵

A few days after the massacre, the bodies of the slain were discovered by a party of Frenchmen. Their heads, most of which had been scalped, were placed on robes of beaver. The Sieur de Lavérendrye was stretched on the ground, face downwards, his back all hacked with a knife, and a hoe sunk in his loins.¹⁶ His headless trunk was decked out with garters and bracelets of porcupine quill.

As to Father Aulneau, he was resting on one knee, an arrow in his side, a gaping wound in his breast, his left hand to the ground and his right raised as if in the act of giving absolution.¹⁷ It was said afterwards that the majority of the aggressors were

¹⁵See Appendix A.

¹⁶Others say "with a big hole in his loins." This depends on the way we read the original French MSS. *Trouée* (hole), et *houe* (hoe) are very much alike in cursive writing. The cut in the sternum of Lavérendrye's skeleton, which the writer has seen, looks very much like the result of a large and more or less dull implement.

¹⁷The York Factory document, to which we have already alluded, after describing as above the condition of Lavérendrye's body when found, and adding the information that it was headless, goes on to say: "Father Arneau, not decapitated, had a terrible wound in the abdomen, whose entrails had been torn out and spread on the ground. His left hand was cut off" (*En route pour la Mer Glaciale*, p. 192).

averse to putting him to death, and that it was only through sheer bravado that a crazy-brained Indian set at naught the consequences which others dreaded.

Ma très chère mère.

Le long séjour que j'ay été, contre mon attente, obligé de faire à
Montreal, me procure encore une fois le plaisir de vous donner de
nouvelles assurances de mon respectueux attachement. J'en pris
semaine, n'ayant, grâces à Dieu, d'autre peine que celle de m'éloigner
trop peu pouvoir vous donner de mes lettres, et si souvent des sortes
aussi souvent que je le voudrois, portées qu'à 340 lieues d'ici
j'auray encore le plaisir de vous écrire. J'en profitay avec la plus
fervente, plaisir, voila une grande partie dans laquelle l'assurance
me fait entre, pour dieu ma chère mère de me faire la grâce de
la faire une bonne mariage digne de lui. Je prie que l'heure soit
vraiment de toutes sortes de consolation humaine, une abandonnera, et
que l'autre mille des forces où je vais pratiquer le reste de ma vie
au milieu des bantes forces, je ne trouve pas de quoi contenter mon
ame, je prie de l'ouverture du moins, de quoi la délivrer et l'assurer
pas mes souffrances conjoint le supplice de votre envoi, beaucoup, et
de me donner la grâce de la supposer avec resignation à la fin
sainte et Divine volonté. Je prie que que tous les jours pour vous aux 18
sacrifice de la mort et de continuer jusqu'à la mort de vous donner,
cette unique marque qui soit en mon pouvoir. Dame juive, reconnaître
je suis ma chère mère avec un profond respect.

A Montreal le 12^e juin. 1733

Votre très humble et obéissant
serviteur en f. J. P. Aulneau
D. L C. D. J. Mill. ind.

AUTOGRAPH LETTER OF FATHER AULNEAU.

TRANSLATION.

My dear Mother.

The long stay which, against my expectation, I have been obliged
to make at Montreal, procures me once more the pleasure of giving
you new assurances of my respectful attachment. I depart thence

The first of these consequences, if we are to believe the same informants, was a deafening clap of thunder, which struck terror into the hearts of the whole band. They precipitately decamped with their booty, among which were the sacred vessels which the missionary had used for divine service. These, or at least the chalice, fell to the lot of a widow who, in an incredibly short time, lost almost all her sons. So impressed was she by the malediction that seemed to attach itself to the mysterious vessel, that she threw it into a river.

Thus ended Father Aulneau's dreams of evangelization among the Mandans. It seems that, in his latter days, he had some sort of premonition of his forthcoming fate, since, but a fortnight before his death, he had written to Father Degonnor: "Continue, my dear Father, to pray God for me and

to-morrow, having, thank God, no other care than that of going too far to be in a position to send you letters and receive any from you as often as I should like. Perhaps when 340 leagues from here will it still be possible for me to write to you. I shall do so with the most sensible pleasure. Here is a great career into which Providence leads me; pray to God, my dear Mother, that He may grant me the grace of going through it in a manner worthy of Him. I hope that, deprived for His sake of all human consolations, I will not be forsaken by Him, and that if, in the midst of the forests in which I am going to spend my life with the wild beasts, I do not find the means of satisfying my self-love, I shall at least find wherewith to destroy and annihilate it by means of my sufferings. Beseech the Lord to send me many, and to give me patience to bear them with resignation to His most holy and divine will. I pray almost every day for you during the holy sacrifice of the mass, and I shall continue till my death to give you this only token in my power of my dutiful gratitude. I am, my dear Mother, with profound respect,

Your most humble and obedient servant and son,

J. P. AULNEAU,
Of the Soc. of Jesus, Ind. Miss.

At Montreal, the 12th of June, 1735.

recommend me to the Blessed Virgin. I hope soon to finish my course, but dread lest I finish it badly.”¹⁸ Refined, devoted to duty, and filled with a sense of man’s wretchedness in the eyes of God, he passed away without any of those pangs of apprehension with which those of his parts are familiar. His previous life had been a good preparation for that abrupt ending.¹⁸

¹⁸See Appendix B.



AN OLD SQUAW.

CHAPTER III.

PROGRESS AND DECLINE.

1736-1755.

The tragedy of Massacre Island had in the south the injurious effects which it was easy to foresee. The news of what was called the defeat of the French under Lavérendrye reached Fort Beauharnois, where Legardeur de Saint-Pierre commanded, on August 23, 1736. On the 16th of September, a Sioux chief went to the fort with a silver seal suspended from his ear, which, on examination, proved to be that of Father Aulneau. At this sight the French commander, who was more of a soldier than of a diplomat, tore it off with part of the Indian's ear.

Shortly thereafter the Sioux burned the fort of a tribe allied to the French, and, tearing up the fence of the Catholic mission on Lake Pépin, made a bonfire of its pickets. Thenceforth it was nothing but a series of overt acts of hostility against both fort and mission, and, after a consultation with Father Guignas, the superior of the latter, Saint-Pierre evacuated his establishment, and the priest his mission, on May 30, 1737.¹

¹Governor de Beauharnois wrote in his Report of 1738 that "that officer had added that it would be advantageous to destroy that nation," an undertaking the magnitude of which impetuous Saint-Pierre little realized.

When Lavérendrye heard of the calamity that was added to his many misfortunes, he was nearly crushed by the blow. In the first moments of dazed consternation, he would fain have listened to the earnest solicitations of the Indians to put himself at their head, and avenge such an unprovoked crime. But he soon thought better of it, and, in order to allow the first effervescence of passions to calm down, he gave strict orders that nothing should be done before he had heard from the Great Father in the east, meaning Governor de Beauharnois.

Meantime, on September 17, 1736, he sent for the remains of the slain, namely, the bodies of his son and of the missionary, as well as the heads of the voyageurs,² to which he gave a decent burial in the chapel of his fort.

From that time on many and loud were the cries for a war of extermination on the Sioux. Lavérendrye never countenanced such an undertaking. Yet, in the autumn of the following year, some of the murderers, among whom was the Indian who had killed the priest, were captured by a party of Frenchmen. But as the latter were on the point of taking them to their own settlements, in order to make them undergo the penalty they so richly deserved, the prisoners were rescued by Indians akin in blood and possibly confederate in crime.³

²The bones of these must have been brought later on to Fort St. Charles, as some have been found there in such a pell-mell condition that it is clear the bones, not the bodies, had been gathered in.

³"The Aulneau Collection," p. 106.

Nothing daunted by this disaster, Lavérendrye turned his attention to the resuming of his discoveries. But, in answer to the incessant solicitations of Crees and Assiniboines, he thought it best to repair first to Montreal. His financial situation, which was critical, likewise demanded such a step. De Beauharnois received him well, and strongly urged the advisability of a peaceful course, but the merchants were pitiless. They clearly hinted that mismanagement alone could have brought him to such a pass. On the other hand, the envious were complaining that he looked more after pelts than after new lands to add to the colony. However, by dint of expostulation and self-control, he finally succeeded in outfitting some canoes with which he returned west, reaching Fort St. Charles September 2, 1738.

Meantime three hundred Monsoni warriors had, in company with two hundred and fifty other Crees, left for the land of the Sioux, determined to avenge on their own account the wrong done the French. Shortly thereafter eight hundred Assiniboines had taken the same direction with a like purpose. But smallpox, brought from Hudson Bay, broke out among them and paralyzed their movements. God reserved to Himself the right to avenge the death of His priest and companions.

On the other hand, the Indians, desirous of having the French at the "Great Forks of the Assiniboels,"

erected for them a fort with their own hands.⁴ It therefore behooved the explorer to do something in the direction of their wishes. In the fall of 1738 he left for Lake Winnipeg, and ascended the Red River, reaching the confluence of the Assiniboine 24th September of the same year. He was then on the exact site of what was, in after years, to become the metropolis of the Middle West under the name of Winnipeg City.⁵

Thence, in spite of low water, he went up the Assiniboine as far as a point where it was customary for the Indians to strike overland for Lake Manitoba, to-day Portage la Prairie. There he built a fort which he called Fort la Reine, after the Queen of France. This was to become his second base of operations in the west.

It is foreign to our purpose, and beyond the scope of this work, to follow Lavérendrye and his sons in all their explorations or narrate each one of their

⁴As early as 14th October, 1737, it was intended to transfer Fort Maurepas to "the Great Forks of the Red River, to facilitate navigation and commerce" (Lavérendrye's Journal, as quoted by Beauharnois). To hasten the realization of this plan the Indians "built a large fort at the Forks of the Assiniboins, therein to lodge the French" (Gov. de Beauharnois to the French Minister, 1st Oct., 1738). The native structure must not have been up to the standard of the French trading posts, for in his Journal for the years 1738-39 Lavérendrye states explicitly that "Mr. de la Marque told [him] he had brought Mr. de Louvière to the Forks with two canoes, there to build a fort for the convenience of the Red River people," adding: "I found that expedient, provided the Indians were warned" (of it). This new establishment was the Fort Rouge whose name is now known to all the Winnipeggers.

⁵It is to be hoped that, when the memory of the great Lavérendrye is honoured as it should be in Manitoba, this memorable day, 24th September, may be recognized by some sort of civic celebration in Winnipeg.

commercial ventures. We will simply mention the elder Lavérendrye's great voyage to the land of the Mandans, October, 1738, to February, 1739, and the scarcely less important journeys of his son the Chevalier⁶ to Lakes Manitoba, Dauphin, Winnipegosis and Bourbon, as well as to the lower Saskatchewan. Chevalier de Lavérendrye was the first white man who ever set his eyes on those important geographical points.

In the spring of 1741, his father had again to repair to Montreal, whence he brought Father Claude Godefroy Coquart, S.J., whom, however, some intrigue prompted by jealousy forced him to leave at Michillimakinac.

In the course of the following year (1742) took place that famous voyage which culminated in the Chevalier and his brother François de Lavérendrye discovering the Rocky Mountains, a spur of which they even partially climbed, after having faced numberless perils among hordes of uncouth savages (January, 1743). The explorers must have reached a point in the southwest corner of what is now Montana.

Reverting to the missionary they had left at Fort la Reine, we find that Father Pierre Du Jaunay, of Michillimakinac, had volunteered to evangelize the Mandans, abandoned to their fate since the untimely end of their prospective missionary. "There was a

⁶Pierre Gauthier, his eldest son since the death of Jean-Baptiste.

great likelihood that our religion would take deep roots among these people, to judge from the character attributed to them and their seven villages, the least of which contains fifteen hundred souls," had written Governor Beauharnois, under date August 14, 1739. But Father Du Jaunay's presence was deemed necessary among the Indians who knew him already, and a new man was preferred for the missions of the Far West. Yet he could not go immediately, "to the great regret of everybody and especially myself," laments Lavérendrye.⁷

When did he go? The explorer adds in the memoirs just quoted that "we possess him to-day to the great satisfaction of everybody." Unfortunately that document bears no date. As this missionary was the first priest who ever reached the site of Winnipeg and resided at Fort la Reine, or Portage la Prairie, the question of his arrival in these places is not entirely devoid of importance.

Justice Baby asserts⁸ that Father Coquart was at the latter post from the summer of 1741 to that of 1744, which contention is certainly wide of the mark. We have seen by Lavérendrye's own testimony that Coquart did not accompany him farther than Michillimakinac in 1741. On the other hand, documents are not wanting which peremptorily show that he was in that mission in 1742, and as late as July 27,

⁷Margry, vol. VI., p. 594.

⁸"The Gazette," Dec. 13th, 1899.

1743.⁹ His sojourn in the West must have been very brief, for on July 21, 1744, we see him again at Michillimakinac, where he supplied the ceremonies of baptism on the child of Jacques and Marie Dumée. All circumstances point to his having left for Fort la Reine in the summer (probably August) of 1743.¹⁰ He cannot have stayed there more than eight or nine months.

Father Coquart was then thirty-seven years old, having been born at Calais (others say Melun)

FATHER COQUART'S SIGNATURE.

January 31st (or February 2nd), 1706. He had entered the Society of Jesus on May 14, 1726, and had been sent to Canada twelve years later. Useless to remark that, in the short period of time he passed at Fort la Reine, his ministrations must have been

⁹From the registers of Michillimakinac, which are still extant, we gather that, July 20th, 1742, he made a baptism there, another on the 10th of September of the same year, and a third on Jan. 19th, 1743, so that he was certainly not in the west during the winter of 1742-43. He did indeed take a flying trip to Kaministiquia in September-October, but on the 9th of the latter month he was already back at his post, as is proved by a letter he then wrote from there to the Governor (Beauharnois to the Minister, 12th Oct., 1742).

¹⁰This view is strengthened by the fact that, according to a document dated June 13th, 1743, "on the demand of Father Saint-Pé, Superior of the Jesuits in Canada, the sum of 1,000 livres, which was granted to the two missionaries to the Sioux, and which had been withdrawn, is restored in favour of the missionaries at the posts of Mr. de la Vérendrye" (The President of the Navy Board to Mr. Hocquart).

entirely confined to Lavérendrye's little Canadian troop.

Its commander was himself greatly in need of a mind that could understand him, and in his distress he must have particularly welcomed the consolations of religion. False reports emanating from jealous rivals had embittered Minister de Maurepas against him to the extent that the Canadian governor had felt it his duty to defend him against the charge of peculation, at a time when the poor explorer owed 40,000 livres, and after his creditors had instituted against him a lawsuit for the recovery of the funds they had lent him (August 25, 1740). "Lawsuits for me who abhor them," exclaimed the distracted gentleman in his memoirs. At Michillimakinac goods to the value of 4,000 livres had been seized from his outfit, thereby imperilling his chances of success in the west, which depended so much on the presents he had to make to the Indians and the regularity with which his men were paid.

Finally, so harrowing had become his trials that, in April, 1742, a suggestion had been made to the effect that an officer able to second him should be attached to his expedition. A Sieur De Muy had even been proposed for the position. Lavérendrye's debts then aggregated 50,000 livres, and his returns were almost insignificant.

No wonder, therefore, if, disgusted at the incessant bickerings of his creditors and the intrigues of rival traders, he asked to be relieved of responsibil-

ties which brought on his shoulders nothing but trouble, anxiety and contumely.

This was in the fall of 1744. He had been giving to the work of discovery and settlement the last thirteen years of his life.

When he retired from the unequal contest, six establishments stood to attest his efficiency as an organizer. These were Forts St. Pierre, founded in 1731 on Rainy Lake; St. Charles, on the Lake of the Woods (1732); Maurepas, at the mouth of Winnipeg River (1734); Rouge, at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers; La Reine, at Portage la Prairie (1738), and Dauphin, established in 1741 in the northwest corner of the lake of the same name. Fort Rouge had been erected in October, 1738, but, owing to its proximity to Forts Maurepas and La Reine, its usefulness did not last long.

By himself or through his children, Lavérendrye had not only explored, but mapped out several times, the country between Lake Superior and the Rocky Mountains, and from the Missouri, in the south, to the Saskatchewan, in the north.

And yet no effort had been made in Paris to help him out of his difficulties, after he had personally defrayed the expenses of so many foundations and explorations. He was a military man, and a commission in the army would have considerably eased his financial budget. Governor de Beauharnois was therefore perfectly justified when he wrote, October 27, 1744, to the French Minister, after a frank

defence of the explorer's conduct: "I beseech you to give him tangible tokens of your kindness, in effecting his promotion on the first occasion, as [would warrant] his seniority over those who have been appointed to vacant companies this year. . . . Six years of service in France, thirty-two in this colony, without any cause for reproach (at least I know of none that I could lay at his door), and nine wounds in his body, were motives that could not make me hesitate to propose him for one of the vacant companies."¹¹

Captain Charles Joseph Fleurimont de Noyelle succeeded him in the direction of the western explorations. Born in 1694 or 1695, of French parents, he had seen service at the head of an expedition against the Fox Indians. He did his best to keep the aborigines of the Middle West from the war-path; but he could not be expected to have possessed over them the influence of Lavérendrye, and even that gentleman did not always succeed in keeping them at peace. Moreover, Noyelle was constantly staying at one or another of the eastern posts, not feeling any personal inclination to exert himself as his predecessor had done.

But he had the good sense to call to his assistance the sons of Lavérendrye. The absence of that gentleman from the western plains was bitterly regretted by Beauharnois, who wrote, October 15, 1746: "I will state, my Lord [the French Minister],

¹¹Margry, vol. VI., p. 597.

that that officer is better qualified than anybody to pursue this discovery and that, at the Sieur de Noyelle's request, I shall not hesitate to send back the Sieur de la Vérendrye."

The recall of Beauharnois himself prevented the execution of this plan. His successor, the Marquis de la Galissionnière, must also have been labouring under the impression that some wrong had been done in the administration of the West, when he thus addressed the Minister in Paris, October 23, 1747: "What has been written you with regard to the Sieur de la Véranderye having worked more for his own interests than for the discovery is very false. All the officers who will ever be employed there will of necessity always have to bestow a part of their attention to commerce, as long as the King does not furnish them with other means of subsistence."

This was, of course, nothing but sheer common sense. Yet the wrong done was left unrepaired. After some more lingering in the east, Noyelle had at length to proceed to the seat of his ill-favoured dominions. In the summer of 1748 he saw Fort la Reine for the first time, arriving there in the company of the Chevalier de Lavérendrye, but not before the latter had rebuilt, on his way west, Fort Maurepas, which had been burnt down by the Indians.¹² Pierre Gauthier rendered a similar service

¹²Rev. Geo. Dugas contends (in *L'Ouest Canadien*, pp. 109 and 125) that De Noyelle never went farther west than Michillimakinac, though, p. 112 of the same work, he implicitly admits that he did go to "the western posts."

to the buildings of Fort la Reine, which were crumbling to ruins. Then he went north, and erected that same year a post on Lake Winnipegosis, which became known as Fort Bourbon, and another called Fort Poskoyac, near the forks of the Saskatchewan.

Then Noyelle stepped out of a place for which he had no aptitudes (1749).

This was a good opportunity to send back the veteran discoverer, whose rights to public recognition had been partially acknowledged in 1746 by his promotion to a captaincy, and quite recently (1749) by his appointment to a knighthood of St. Louis. As a matter of fact, in a letter of September 17, 1749, Lavérendrye mentions the order he has received from La Jonquière, the new governor, to resume his discoveries. He had then sent the latter a map of the route to follow (of which accompanying document is probably a reproduction), and had communicated to him his plans for the future. But even at this supreme moment of tardy justice, another disappointment was in store for him. He died, December 6, 1749,¹³ aged sixty-four, and was buried in the vault of Notre-Dame, at Montreal.

Lavérendrye was, according to De Beauharnois who knew him intimately, "a meek, yet firm, man, much more able to draw from the Indians the information necessary for the purpose of this discovery."¹⁴ Posterity, whose horizon is less limited be-

¹³Not the 5th, as a few authors have it.

¹⁴To the French Minister, Quebec, 15th Oct., 1746.

cause not so close to the hero, and who can appreciate at their just value the sterling qualities of this really great man, good Christian and patriot, will no doubt decide that full justice has not been done his memory until a statue is raised him in the territory that was the theatre of his achievements.

His eldest son, the Chevalier, who had already done so much for the Canadian West, seemed to have a right to his succession. Other counsels prevailed. A man who had never seen the country was declared "the officer in the whole colony who had the best knowledge of these regions."¹⁵ This was Jacques Repentigny Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, the fiery soldier whom we have seen constrained to abandon Fort Beauharnois, as a result of the massacre of the Lake of the Woods.

Frustrated in his most legitimate expectations, the Chevalier begged to be allowed to serve under him. St. Pierre refused. A ruined man, with debts amounting to 20,000 livres and credit given the Indians which he was denied an opportunity to retrieve, the Chevalier had no resource left him but to apply for redress to the minister in Paris. This he did in a letter which, for dignified pathos and stern logic, has few equals (September 30, 1750). All was in vain. Intendant Bigot had then the keys of the colonial coffers in Quebec, and it was freely circulated that he wanted at the head of the undertaking somebody less scrupulous than a Lavérendrye.

¹⁵La Jonquière, Quebec, 27th Feb., 1750.

Fur trading and peculating, not exploring, was his real object.

Legardeur de St. Pierre was a native of the seignory of Repentigny, where he was born in 1701. He certainly must have had some experience in the Indian ways, for since his fifteenth year he had lived in contact with the American aborigines. When, in 1737, circumstances forced him to evacuate Fort Beauharnois, among the Sioux, he was entrusted with an expedition against the Chickasaws, and ever since he had seen fire in many a battle with savages.

Yet this was hardly the training that best fitted a man for his new position. He endeavoured honestly to impress upon the natives he now met the necessity of putting an end to their suicidal warfare. But his ways were not winning. Instead of succeeding, he alienated the sympathies of Indians who had remained loyal to Lavérendrye, even when that gentleman had felt it his duty to give them the same advice.

Father Jean-Baptiste de la Morinie (whom St. Pierre calls de la Morénerie) had taken the place of Father Coquart at Fort la Reine, arriving there in the summer of 1750, along with the new commander. Dissatisfied with the ways of the latter, the Assiniboines, on whose lands his establishment stood, were very little disposed to listen to a minister of religion bound to him by so close associations. The priest was discouraged at the little amount of good he could do. Perhaps also did he find life with St. Pierre uncongenial. So he made his way back to Michillimakinac, whence he had come, leaving Fort

la Reine June 22, 1751. He was to be the last missionary in the West for about sixty-five years.¹⁶

We seem to recognize a feeble echo of past misunderstandings between the two gentlemen in the following passages of St. Pierre's journal: "Tired of the wretchedness against which I have been unable to protect him, he [La Morinie] made up his mind to return. . . . I would have been sensible to his departure, if it had been in my power to render life more easy for him. I think that he will not forget this caravan, and that he will not consent to have me for a companion except with proper guarantees. I cannot speak of his labours. He took no latitude and made no [astronomical] observations. It is true that he had left without the least mathematical instrument, something I did not expect. It is also impossible for me to speak of any progress in the religious line, since he could not speak any Indian tongue, and moreover neither his eloquence nor his piety could have enlightened barbarians who are hardened in their blindness."¹⁷

¹⁶Father de la Morinie was born at Périgueux, France, 24th Dec., 1705 (others say 1704). He entered the Society of Jesus Oct. 6th, 1724; arrived in Canada in 1736, and returned to France in the spring of 1764.

¹⁷Margry, vol. VI., p. 641. In the face of these explicit statements of the only one who could speak from personal knowledge, and did so at a time when Father de la Morinie was still living, it is hard to see on what authority L. A. Prud'homme can base the following assertion he published lately: "The Indians have always contended that these two missionaries visited them and gave them the first notions of the Gospel. They did profit by the teaching they received, for, over half a century after the departure of those religious, the traders who crossed this valley remarked to their great surprise that these poor Indians, in spite of such a long neglect, still remembered their prayers" (*Revue Canadienne*, 1908, p. 460). We have already seen that evangelizing the natives had been an impossibility for Father Coquart.

Possessed of an excellent opinion of himself St. Pierre did not confine his criticisms to his chaplain. He alone held the secret of the way to the Western Sea. This was, he avers, through the source of the Missouri, wherefore he felt that "the plans of Mr. de la Vérendrye were not solid, since it was not possible to succeed by another route."¹⁸ What a pity the good man did not live to hear of Mackenzie's discovery of that much wanted sea by a still more northern route than that advocated by Lavér- endrye!

St. Pierre had for a lieutenant the Chevalier Boucher de Niverville. He ordered him to the Saskatchewan, with directions to establish a post three hundred leagues farther up than Fort Poskoyac. In consequence, that gentleman left Fort la Reine late in 1750; but he fell seriously ill at the former place. However, ten of his men ascended the Saskatchewan and built a spacious fort on the Bow River, just where Calgary now stands (May 29, 1751), which became known as Fort La Jonquière, but was never utilized in spite of the abundant stores left within its wall.

The commander then undertook to go and join De Niverville; but he learned on the way that the Indians who were to accompany him in his proposed explorations, a party that counted forty or forty-five tepees and had camped in the near proximity of Fort La Jonquière, had been treacherously massa-

¹⁸Margry, vol. VI., p. 651.

cred, to a man, by Assiniboines. St. Pierre hearing of this had nothing left but to retrace his steps.

Things were decidedly shaping themselves for the worst. The commander had scarcely been home any length of time when he had an experience which might have resulted in disaster for himself and party. On February 22, 1752, he was alone at Fort la Reine with only five men, the other fourteen having gone foraging, when, at about nine o'clock in the morning, some two hundred armed Assiniboines invaded his establishment. To rush to the insolent fellows was the work of an instant for a man of St. Pierre's temper.

"You are very bold to enter that way my home," he cried out through his interpreter. "What do you want?"

"We have come to smoke," answered someone in Cree.

"Queer way indeed to prepare for a smoke!" put in St. Pierre. "Begone!" he thundered, as he bodily ejected four of the braves and returned to his room.

But presently a soldier hastened to tell him that a crowd of savages had invaded the guard house and seized the arms. Whereupon the commander flew thither, and thought of preparing his men for a battle.

"Yes, we are going to kill him and plunder his place," now sneered an Assiniboine, who realized the helplessness of the French against such numbers.

But St. Pierre was equal to the occasion. He took up a firebrand, and, bursting open the door of the powder house, he knocked in the head of two barrels of powder.

"You are going to kill me, are you?" he vociferated in a perfect rage. "Well, I shall not die alone." . . .

Which saying, he feigned to apply his firebrand to the powder.¹⁹ But no eloquence or indignation was now needed. The braves no sooner took in the situation than they scampered away at a furious rate, almost tearing the gate off its hinges in their efforts to dash out.

In July of the same year (1752) St. Pierre left for Grand Portage, in the east, with the returns of his trade, to meet the canoes that brought him his outfit for the following year. After what had happened, he thought best to take all his men with him, commending his establishment to the care of a friendly band of Assiniboines. Four days after his departure nothing remained of it but ashes.

In this plight St. Pierre had to winter on the Red River. On the other hand, Fort La Jonquière being abandoned, this gradual retreat from the west was ominous for French influence there.

Persuaded that, owing to the restiveness of the natives, "it was not possible to penetrate farther

¹⁹"I passed my firebrand over and over the powder," he says with a touch of exaggeration. Had he done so, he would not have lived to tell of it.



AN INDIAN OF THE FAR NORTHWEST.

than he had done,"²⁰ though personally he had scarcely gone west of Fort la Reine, he repaired to Montreal, September 20, 1753. On the way he met the Chevalier St. Luc de la Corne,²¹ to whom he handed over his command of the western posts.

La Corne's administration fell on evil days. A cloud which had long been hanging over France had just burst in the shape of the Seven Years War. Notwithstanding the general anxiety, it was La Corne who was responsible for the first attempt at agriculture in the Canadian Northwest. This took place in the valley of the Carrot River, a tributary to the Saskatchewan, which he reached by the end of 1753. This he greatly improved by putting up new buildings, so that it eventually lost its original name in favour of Fort La Corne, which it bore until the conquest of Canada and long after.

Not much later La Corne established a fort not far from Lake Cumberland, vestiges of which were found in 1772.

²⁰Margry, vol. VI., p. 651.

²¹Captain Louis St. Luc de la Corne was a brother of the Abbé of the same name, who is well known in Canadian history. He was born at Cataracoui (now Kingston) 6th June, 1703, and had distinguished himself as a soldier, especially at Fort Clinton in 1741, and also at the battle of Carillon, where he captured 150 waggons from General Abercrombie. He took part in several engagements in the campaign which culminated in the fall of Quebec, and was wounded at the battle of Sainte-Foy. Then he attempted to sail for France along with many other noblemen; but, instead of being drowned in the wreck of the ship *Auguste*, as Prud'homme asserts (*Les Successeurs de la Vérendrye*, p. 80) after some authors, he came back to Canada, where he filled an honourable career, serving on the English side in the War of Independence, and afterwards becoming a member of the Legislative Council at Quebec. He died in the course of 1784.

But the time for French expansion and new foundations in the Middle West was gone. Canada was assailed by the English. Scarcely able to stand alone, she could not dream of discoveries, and perforce forgot the Western Sea. Gradually her distress became greater; she needed the assistance of all her children. As La Corne was an officer, he was recalled some time during 1755, and, at the head of Indian troops, he distinguished himself in battles that could not save his fatherland.

Thus ended the first activities of the Catholics in the Canadian West. These humble beginnings were to be nothing but the harbinger of more glorious days.

CHAPTER IV.

AN EPOCH OF TRANSITION.

1756-1810.

We have now reached a period of transition and self-effacement for the Catholic Church in the Canadian West. Henceforth she retires, the better to advance when the hour appointed by Divine Providence shall have struck. Instead of acting directly by her ordained ministers, she will now exercise her influence through her lay children.

This was not a matter of choice with her. Events over which she had no control precluded the possibility of any other line of conduct. At the cession of Canada to Great Britain (1760), not a few members of the clergy went over to the motherland rather than serve under the new masters, with the result that it became difficult to provide for the spiritual needs of even the regularly organized parishes. Furthermore, the Church lost by the suppression of the Jesuits in 1773 the only missionaries she possessed in northeastern America. Hence it could not be a question of the Far West, which had just been abandoned by the civil authorities.

It is, however, more than probable that some of the Canadians who had taken a liking to the free, roving life of the plains, or had perhaps become

entangled in matrimonial unions with the daughters of the soil, preferred to stay and be faithful to their new friends, to returning and subjecting themselves again to the restraints of civilization, which had lost all charms for them.

The origin of that wonderful race, the Half-breeds, has certainly been set down at too recent a date.¹ As early as 1775 the Indians of the Canadian West recognized them as superior to themselves in war and at the chase,² which implies that some there were already who were old enough to pursue either avocation. Nay, in 1778, a halfbreed family answering to the name of Beaulieu was found as far north as the Slave River, when the first fur traders reached that country.³ There can therefore be no reasonable doubt that several servants of the French explorers had contracted matrimonial alliances with the natives, which were probably blessed by the missionary. These voyageurs, after they had become encumbered with halfbreed families, were not likely to abandon their adopted country, any more than men of their class are known to have done in after years.

¹In a valuable treatise on the French element in the Northwest, L. A. Prud'homme gives 1775 as the possible, if not probable, date of the first unions of the French with the native women (*L'Élément Français au Nord-Ouest*, p. 29).

²"One of the chiefs assured me that the children borne by their women to Europeans were bolder warriors and better hunters than themselves" ("Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories," by Alexander Henry, p. 248. Toronto, 1901).

³Moreover, John Macdonell, with whom the reader will soon become acquainted, had married a halfbreed lassie, named Poitras, apparently several years before 1800.

These *coureurs de bois*, despite their many shortcomings, were possessed of the inappreciable gift of faith, and this they strove to communicate to their children. Subsequent events were to show that their efforts were crowned with success. Indeed, it is quite likely that to them and their masters we must look for acts of proselytism which have been put to the credit of the missionary priests. Thus, to quote but one instance, Daniel W. Harmon, a trader of the Far West, relates that a French missionary once resided at the mouth of Dauphin River, and that "there are some Indians still living who recollect prayers which were taught them by the missionary."⁴ This was written in 1800. Now there never was any priest either at Dauphin River or at Dauphin Lake, during the French occupation of the country. But we have seen that, in 1741, the Chevalier de Lavérendrye established a post at the latter place. The formulas Harmon mentions must have been taught by that gentleman or his men, possibly by some who had married in the tribe that traded there.⁵

Then, apart from the pioneers who remained, we have the French Canadians who went to the Upper Country, as what we now call Manitoba was originally known, after the cession, and prior to the orga-

⁴Journal, p. 26 of New York edition (1903).

⁵The passage of Cox's "Columbia," which is usually quoted or referred to (Masson's *Les Bourgeois du Nord-Ouest*, vol. I., pp. 8, 9; Geo. Dugas, *L'Ouest Canadien*, p. 149) as illustrating the influence of the early Jesuit missionaries over the Indians, applies to the region contiguous to Lake Superior, not to the Middle West.

nization of the Northwest Company. Thus a Louis Nolin settled in the Red River valley as early as 1776; another French Catholic, Augustin Cadot, was in the same region in 1780. These are examples that represent a class—the famous freemen—that became very numerous on the western plains.

Prior to the cession, all the traders in the Canadian West had been French, the English of Hudson's Bay never daring to venture any distance inland. Taught by experience acquired in Lower Canada, the authorities had limited the number of fur traders to a few individuals, licensed for specified territories, in order that any violation of the laws forbidding the giving of liquor to Indians might be brought home to the proper party. These restrictions were done away with by the new masters of the land. As a consequence, a few daring English-speaking, and generally Protestant, individuals soon improved their opportunity, and penetrated into the mysterious West, in quest of pelts. Unfortunately intoxicants usually formed the most prominent part of their cargoes, and it is impossible to exaggerate the disorders to which the fiery liquid gave rise among the Indians. Murders and rapes, robberies and assaults of all kinds arose from drinking as light results from the rays of the sun.⁶

⁶The following, taken at random from the journal of one of those traders, is a fair instance of the results of intoxicants among the Indians at the time we have reached in our narrative: "Wm. Henry gave out a 10-gallon keg of high wine [alcohol] gratis. During the boisson Porcupine Tail's son was murdered by a Courte Oreille, his beau-frère; he received 15 stabs in the belly and breast, and fell

A young Scotchman, by the name of Alexander Henry, was one of the first non-Catholics who undertook fur trading after the departure of the French (1761-76). He was in partnership with a Jean-B. Cadot, and piloted by another Catholic, Etienne Campion, while his entire crew belonged likewise to the race of the original voyageurs.

Others soon followed his example, who in a short time amassed a wealth of furs which contributed immensely to swell the ranks of the English traders. Hence no rich merchant in Montreal would hesitate a moment to advance them the necessary goods.

But this very plethora of amateur traders in pelts, besides being the source of untold demoralization, resulted in the ruin of some of the adventurers, who found themselves outwitted by others with more rum to give out and fewer scruples to check their cupidity.

On the other hand, the Hudson's Bay Company which, after the French regime, had renewed trading operations with the Indians of the plains, saw with alarm this new plague of locusts that swarmed in its preserves. Its members exerted themselves with a vigour hitherto unknown in their frozen

dead on the spot. A few days before this affair the same Courte Oreille had fired at him, but as the gun was only loaded with powder, only a few grains entered the skin and did no injury. About ten days ago another Saulteur was murdered by his wife, who put the muzzle of his gun in his mouth and blew the back part of his head away. They were a young couple, with a boy about a year old. . . . Murders among these people are so frequent that we pay little attention to them. Their only excuse for such outrages is that they are drunk." ("Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson," vol. I., p. 429. New York, 1897).

homes, established new posts, sent out scouring parties to snatch the furs from the Indians in debt to them, and strove to enforce their monopoly over the trade.

The Montreal merchants, who furnished the goods to the adventurers who acted as their agents, soon realized that concerted action was necessary if the Canadians were to cope successfully with their well organized English rivals. This was the origin of the famous Northwest Fur Trading Company. Messrs. Benjamin and Joseph Frobisher, with Mr. Simon McTavish, were its founders and first partners (1784).

In an incredibly short time this energetic corporation covered the whole of British North America with a perfect network of trading posts and trails, which left very little to be done by its rich, but less enterprising, rival, the Hudson's Bay Company. When, to save its own existence, the latter awoke to the necessity of adopting to a great extent the methods of the French, as the Canadians were called, and set up new forts side by side with theirs, a struggle ensued the bitterness of which cannot be realized by those who have not lived in the fur-bearing regions, away from all the restraints imposed by religion or civilization.

Nevertheless, the odds were in favour of the Canadian concern. Knowing the preference of the Indians for the French,⁷ the Northwest Company

⁷Whom they loved best, though they feared the English most, according to St. Pierre.

made it a point to be represented on the plains by as many individuals of that nationality as possible. In fact, practically all its employees, foremen, voyageurs, guides and interpreters were French, and therefore Catholics, while many of its clerks belonged to the same race and denomination.⁸

So it came to pass that French was, for over fifty years, the official and universally spoken language in the Canadian West outside of the Hudson's Bay Company factories. Even the Scotch gentlemen at the head of the principal posts had to know that language, and the ease with which they interspersed their correspondence, when in their own mother tongue, with French idioms and sometimes full sentences is good evidence that they had indeed mastered it.

As a class, the children of the St. Lawrence, deprived of all that recalled religion and refinement, could not be described as exemplary Christians. But it is certainly an injustice to describe them as irreligious. Their language too often savoured of profanity and foolish bravado; but it was not a safe gauge to their inmost convictions. They often remained as faithful in their observance of the laws of God and of the Church as their peculiar condition, the state of the country and their dependence on others would allow.

⁸Abbé G. Dugas asserts that "three-quarters of its clerks were English or Scotch (*L'Ouest Canadien*, p. 163). As a matter of fact, in the year 1804, which he quotes in this connection, out of seventy-two clerks in the employ of the Company, thirty-one were French.

The recital of a few daily prayers, though not general, was not a rare occurrence among them; the various feasts of the liturgical year were remembered and observed when possible; baptism was administered to infants and the dying, and those that passed away were not returned to Mother Earth without some simple religious ceremony.

"This, according to the Frenchmen, is Easter Sunday," writes James Mackenzie, no great friend of theirs, under date April 11, 1799.⁹ He goes on to state the same day: "Cadien Leblanc's wife having fallen sick. . . . Dusablon, though the *plus bête*, was ordained priest; by him the dying woman was baptized."¹⁰ Likewise Alexander Henry the younger chronicles the following year a similar recognition of a Church festival by the members of his crew, in which, for the lack of any special religious exercises or services, he had himself to concur according to the fashion of the time. "I gave my people each a dram, this day being considered among them a great fête," he writes under date November 1, 1800.¹¹ It is in a like manner that was solemnized in the west the feast of the Epiphany the following year.¹² Finally we see a more Christian-like way of celebrating the Church's festivals among his men when, under date November 1, 1810, the same trader simply remarks: "Men did not work to-day."¹³

⁹In Masson's *Les Bourgeois du Nord-Ouest*, vol. II., p. 385.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Journal*, vol. I., p. 133.

¹

¹²*Ibid.*, *ibid.*, p. 165.

¹³*Ibid.*, vol. II., p. 660.

This remembrance of the feast days so religiously kept on the shores of the St. Lawrence, coupled with the above mentioned practices, as well as extemporized discourses on God, His laws and what was known of Sacred History, could not but affect favourably the native population. It is thus that the Catholics of that forlorn period were insensibly taking the place of the missionaries, who could not be spared for the west.

Nay, even civilization, as we generally understand it, usually benefited by their presence among the dusky children of plains and forests. It is well known that, in aboriginal society, woman is scarcely more esteemed than a brute. Her chief rôle, while on the march, is to be the beast of burden of the entire family, her lord and master being too far above her to condescend to do any packing. Now here is what we read in the journal of one of the Scotch *bourgeois*, as the wintering partners of the Northwest Company were called:

"Lambert went with his *Bona Roba* to gather moss for their son.¹⁴ . . . Soon after he arrived with a huge load on his back, while *Madame* walked slowly behind, carrying nothing but her little snarling brat. *Masquasis*,¹⁵ seeing him arrive thus accoutred, observed that Lambert wanted nothing

¹⁴This material is used in connection with infants' cradles in the north.

¹⁵An Indian.

more to make him a woman than a cloak with a red lining over a black fringe.”¹⁸

These and other attentions of the Canadian to the mother of his child appear to us but natural. They were not so to the natives, and were bound in time to exert an appreciably civilizing influence over the tribes.

As above stated, most of the English-speaking traders were Protestants. There were exceptions, however. One of these was the case of a John Macdonell, whose brother Miles will soon call for extended notice. John Macdonell stands out as a unique figure, stern and conscientious, amid a number of trading officers whose daily lives were in opposition to all laws of justice and decency. He was a strict Roman Catholic, and his men had surnamed him “The Priest,” on account of his scrupulous observance of the Church feasts and weekly abstinence, as well as the rigidity with which he enforced it on his subordinates.

A member of a United Empire Scotch family, John became a partner of the Northwest Company about 1796, and remained in the Northwest until 1815. As early as 1793 we find him stationed in the valley of the Assiniboine, where he represented his corporation, and probably disapproved of its violently hostile proceedings against the Hudson’s Bay Company. This we infer from his well-known probity and recorded conduct when in other places.

¹⁸*Les Bourgeois du Nord-Ouest*, vol. II., p. 373.

In 1806 he was at the important post his company had at Ile à la Crosse, where his competitor on behalf of the Hudson's Bay Company was a Mr. Fiddler, who had just come from Churchill Factory with a party of eighteen men to establish a trading station. The historian of that corporation, Willson Beckles, explicitly states that John Macdonell was then removed from his post, because he was not "inclined to set all principles of law and justice at defiance,"¹⁷ the most honourable testimonial a man in his position could ever get.¹⁸

The hostility between the Northwest and the Hudson's Bay Companies was growing more and more open, so that the latter, tired of its masterly inactivity in its original haunts, where for a long time it had awaited the native hunters instead of seeking

¹⁷"The Great Company," vol. II., p. 118. London, 1900.

¹⁸In 1815 John Macdonell sold out his interests in the Northwest Company and settled at Pointe Fortune, in the Township of Hawkesbury, where he kept a store and ran boats to Montreal. In September, 1814, he was dwelling at a place called *Long Sault*, on the St. Lawrence, where he hospitably received Gabriel Franchère and his party of Astorians from far off Columbia. Exactly three years later (Sept. 17th, 1817,) he was still there, and was visited by a similar party hailing from the same quarters. Ross Cox's remarks on the quondam Westerner will bear repetition:

"Here we met another retired partner of the Northwest Company, Mr. John McDonald (*sic*), who insisted on our visiting his house. . . . This gentleman was a strict Roman Catholic, and during his residence in the Indian country, was distinguished by the Canadians from others of the same name by the title of *Le Prêtre* (priest), owing to the rigid manner in which he made his men adhere to the various fasts of the Catholic Church. . . . From this circumstance, joined to his general character among the *voyageurs*, I was led to expect in Mr. McDonald a second St. Francis; but in lieu of the austere monk, we saw in the retired trader a cheerful, healthy and contented old man—a proof, if any were wanting, that true piety and social gayety are not incompatible" ("Adventures on the Columbia River," pp. 302-3).

them out, finally resolved to carry the war into Africa. With this end in view it established posts on the upper Assiniboine (1790), at Brandon (1794), near Portage la Prairie (1796), and on the Red River (1799).

The influence of religion was sadly needed to keep within just bounds men who, emancipated from all human laws, were devoured by an unconquerable thirst for gold, represented by furs, and fought a deadly struggle for the mastery of a territory which one party claimed in virtue of a royal charter, while the other was as sure of its rights to it, which it based on a priority of discovery, and considered had been made over to Canada at the cession of the country.

But God, who knows how to draw good from evil, had decreed that the instrument in the permanent establishment of His Church in that remote wilderness was to be one who did not belong to her visible body. He also willed that the very excesses of which the traders were to render themselves guilty should be the means of hastening that establishment.

PART II.

Permanent Establishment in Middle West.

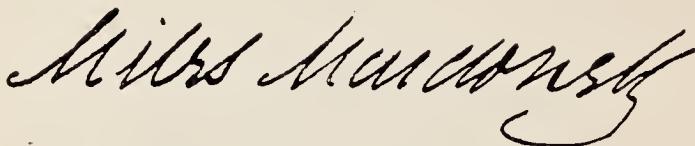
CHAPTER V.

THE RED RIVER SETTLEMENT.

1811-1815.

While the two rival companies were endeavouring to oust each other from the valleys of the Red River and tributaries, a man in distant Scotland, a noble mind and a great heart, was maturing philanthropical plans to better the lot of the lower classes of his own country as well as of Ireland. Thomas Douglas, Earl of Selkirk, having purchased a great number of shares in the Hudson's Bay Company, and secured the possession of some 110,000 square miles of land on the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, proceeded to get settlers for his proposed colony. He then entrusted the direction of this to a former officer of the King's Regiment of New York, promoted in 1796 to the rank of captain in the Canadian militia. This was Miles Macdonell, the brother of the Northwest Company partner on the Assiniboine.

Born in 1767, at Inverness, Scotland, Macdonell¹ probably came to America with his father in 1773, settling at first on the Mohawk River, and, on the breaking out of the War of Independence, removing to Canada. Miles having taken a trip to England in the first years of the nineteenth century, he made the acquaintance in London of some of the directors of the Hudson's Bay Company, and, through them,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Miles Macdonell". The signature is fluid and somewhat stylized, with the name clearly legible.

MILES MACDONELL'S SIGNATURE.

of the Earl of Selkirk. As an inducement to accept the exceedingly onerous duties of the position then offered him, he received, in addition to the half-pay of an ensign,² the grant of a large tract of land in the colony of which he was to be the governor.³

With characteristic broad-mindedness Lord Sel-

¹Whose name is variously spelt McDonell, McDonnell, and even McDonald. The reproduction in our pages of his autograph shows the correct orthography therefor.

²The rank he held in the English army.

³See Macdonell to the Earl of Selkirk, 11th Aug., 1812. Such has been the ignorance of the origins of the Canadian Middle West evidenced by most writers, that they usually set down its history as commencing with the foundation of Lord Selkirk's Settlement. Robert B. Hill has a reference, brief and unfounded on fact, to the presence there of a French missionary in the dim past ("Manitoba," p. 11); Alexander Ross has not a word of either missionaries or French explorers, any more than J. J. Hargrave or Donald Gunn. Though the latter goes back in his quaint volume to Christopher Columbus in order to trace out the history of the Canadian West, he has not a word, not even the least reference, for the brilliant achievements of the immortal Lavérendrye! It would be just as well to write the history of Eastern Canada without any mention of Champlain.

kirk had explicitly ignored all differences of creed in the selection of his colonists. Nay, he had even secured for those of the Catholic faith the services of a chaplain in the person of a Rev. Charles Bourke.

The first band of emigrants left Stornoway, in the Hebrides, on July 26, 1811, and reached York Factory, on Hudson Bay, September 24th, after a passage that was boisterous in more ways than one. The total of the party as they left "was ninety labourers and fifteen writers," or clerks destined for the Hudson's Bay Company's establishments. Among the former we find such Irish names as Costello, John Burke, Michael Bourke, Pat Flynn, Henry and Bryan Gilgan, Pat Quinn, Michael and Phil. Rooney, Davey McRooney, Jo. Walsh, Pat Corcoran, Cornelius Hoys and Sweeney.

The Irish were declared by Factor William Auld, the head of York Factory, to be unruly and unfit for the country. But almost in the same breath he betrays the secret of his aversion to them. "Their difference in a religious [point of] view," he writes, "contributes to confirm the unfriendliness of the Scotch and Orcadians [and no doubt his own] for them." On the other hand, Macdonell, who certainly ought to know them well, asserts that they "were not more troublesome than the others; the people from Glasgow were at first the most turbulent."⁴

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that there was

⁴Letter to A. Wedderburne, 5th Oct., 1811.

trouble on board the emigrants' ship, in which the Irish had a hand for reasons which appear from a letter of William Auld. Therein he refers to one William Finley as having ridiculed "the ceremonies observed in celebrating divine service by the priest (so utterly unlike our Scotch clergy). I guess," adds the trader, "that he received afterwards certain treatment which, on such an obstinate, troublesome fellow, could not fail to urge him to something improper."⁵

As the season was too far advanced, the party had to winter in temporary cabins put up on Nelson River, a few miles above the fort. During this irksome period of inaction, Macdonell became confirmed in his opinion that Mr. Bourke was not the proper person for a chaplain to his Irish and Scotch Catholics. That priest, besides being eccentric, was now reported to have left without the leave of his Ordinary, the Bishop of Killala, who was away in Dublin at the time of the ship's sailing.

Nevertheless, Rev. Mr. Bourke was not without his redeeming qualities. "He is very zealous for the increase of our colony," writes Macdonell; "he assures me that he can get thousands to come from the county of Mayo; has written very encouraging letters to his own relations, and wrote letters for almost every one of his flock to their friends in the same encouraging strain."⁶

⁵Letter dated 12th Sept., 1812.

⁶To Lord Selkirk, 1st Oct., 1811.

That these good dispositions continued in spite of the general discontent occasioned by inaction, the severity of the climate and the difficulty of securing satisfactory food, is shown by a further letter of Governor Macdonell to his illustrious patron. "The chaplain is very sanguine for the advancement of the colony, and continues to write encouraging letters home," he remarks under date May 31, 1812. "I believe he is about to write to Your Lordship and intends to offer his personal services to recruit in Ireland." Whereupon Macdonell assures the noble lord that "he may be more useful there than here. . . . I do not think that he will ever make a convert to the Catholic religion."

Yet the writer and his co-religionists could not be without the ministrations of a priest. He therefore adds: "I should not, however, wish to part with him until another was on the way to join us. I expect that hereafter there will be no difficulty in getting a priest to come out who can be well recommended." But in this anticipation Macdonell was doomed to disappointment.

Mr. Bourke returned to Ireland by the next boat. No very serious charge had been laid against him, apart from an irregular departure and eccentric ways which prevented him from having any influence over his people. It appears that he had passed a good part of his time in collecting specimens of rocks, with wonderful ideas concerning their value. In this connection Lord Selkirk wrote a year later:

"Mr. Bourke's minerals turn out to be mere *chucky stanes*. Mr. Lasserre⁷ is a much better judge of that point, and if he can find you iron ore below some hemlock swamp, I shall reckon it more valuable than all the diamonds Mr. Bourke will ever find."⁸

This first contingent of settlers, in which, as we have seen, the Catholic element was not inconsiderable,⁹ left for Red River in the early days of July, 1812, and reached its destination by the end of the following August. The second band was composed of Irishmen under the leadership of a fellow countryman, Owen Keveney, whose despotic ways were ultimately to seal his doom. This severity led to serious trouble aboard his ship, and Irish hating Auld exulted over the predicament of Keveney's people, writing to the Earl of Selkirk that "the Irishmen have shown themselves worthy of that ferocious character so long deserved by them."¹⁰

An unwelcome consequence of these difficulties was that the founder of the colony, hearing so much of the restiveness of the Irish emigrants, cancelled

⁷A surgeon who died in 1813, on the trip from Europe to Hudson Bay.

⁸To Macdonell, 12th June, 1813.

⁹A fact which seems unknown to most of the English historians, who generally give out as Scotch Protestants the emigrants who left for Red River in 1811 and 1813.

¹⁰York Factory, 12th Sept., 1812. Keveney perished miserably at the hands of the minions of the Northwest Company, who had arrested him on a charge of cruelty to his men. While he was being taken east, an Indian, acting apparently on secret orders, attempted his life several times, in which task he was as often thwarted by his two French-Canadian companions. Finally, having landed on an island, Keveney was shot, while in irons, by a halfbreed and dispatched by sabre thrusts at the hands of an ex-Meuron soldier, 9th Sept., 1816.

his orders for further canvassing in Ireland. Another result of the same intelligence was that he abandoned his plan for sending Macdonell a priest, after a failure to get one from a bishop to whom he had applied.¹¹

The number of the emigrants who left Ireland in 1812 has generally been put down at fifteen or twenty.

The third contingent for the distant settlement sailed from Scotland in 1813. It was composed of stalwart Highlanders who had resisted *vi et armis* eviction from their lands on the Sutherland estate. They were staunch Presbyterians, for whom Lord Selkirk hoped to procure a minister at the time that he would send a priest to the Catholics. He cautioned Macdonell not to do anything that could "alarm the prejudices of those people. . . . After a little personal acquaintance," he remarked, "they will be convinced that a Roman Catholic may be a very good man."¹²

These reached the Red River Valley in 1814, to the number of ninety-three.

The year 1815 witnessed the arrival in the Red River Valley of the most numerous of the emigrant parties sent by Lord Selkirk's agents. It was composed of one hundred persons of all ages, mostly from the parish of Kildonan, in Scotland. This brought to two hundred and eighty the total of all

¹¹To Macdonell, 12th June, 1813.

¹²To the same, same date.

the colonists due to the noble Lord's exertions. Thereafter accessions to their ranks were to be individual, rather than collective, cases.

Far from us the wish to belittle in the least the importance of the movement which resulted in the Red River Settlement. But when the history of Manitoba receives adequate treatment, a fact should not be forgotten which so far all authors have either ignored or left in the background. When the first of Lord Selkirk's settlers set foot in the Red River Valley, they found there, and in the vicinity, a white or halfbreed population which far exceeded in numbers all the emigrants that the earl ever sent there.

As we have seen, the personnel of the Northwest Company was made up of French Canadians and their grown-up children. Taking a leaf from its scheming antagonist, even the Hudson's Bay Company had succeeded in engaging some of them for its service. By actual computation the Canadian corporation had, in the first years of the nineteenth century, no less than three hundred and eleven French Catholic employees within the valleys of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers.¹³ Added to the few men who belonged to its English rival, and the much more numerous class of the freemen—former servants of either company, or *coureurs de bois* direct from Lower Canada¹⁴—the total of the Catholic pop-

¹³Or about twelve hundred in all its posts.

¹⁴In April, 1816, Lord Selkirk referred to them as a "great body" (Letter to the Bishop of Quebec), and, at the same date, Miles Macdonell was writing to the same party that there were "hundreds" of them.

ulation within easy reach of the new settlers must have been in the close proximity of seven hundred.

How did these old possessors of the soil receive the newcomers in 1812? The historian Alexander Ross shall answer for us. "But a few hours had passed over their heads in the land of their adoption, when an array of armed men of grotesque mould, painted, disfigured, and dressed in the savage costume of the country, warned them that they were unwelcome visitors. These crested warriors, for the most part, were employees of the Northwest Company, and as their peremptory mandate to depart was soon aggravated by the fear of perishing through want of food, it was resolved to seek refuge at Pembina, seventy miles distant."¹⁵

This treatment, most ungenerous as it was, will scarcely astonish, when we are told that the Northwest Company, which saw in the proposed settlement a danger to its supremacy in the West, moved heaven and earth to prevent its consummation. The Red River country was the natural store whence it derived the buffalo meat which was converted into pemmican¹⁶ for the victualling of its numerous posts; a colony there would inevitably result in driving away the animals that were the source of the supply. Moreover that corporation had then the upper hand over its rivals, and it meant to maintain its position at all costs; but a colony in the country would bring

¹⁵"The Red River Settlement," p. 21. London, 1856.

¹⁶Lean venison cut up into strips, dried, pounded and converted into a paste by means of melted fat. It was kept in skin bags.

in too many disinterested witnesses to dealings that would scarcely pass muster in civilized lands. In the third place, the settlers came under the auspices of a man who had become the main shareholder of the Hudson's Bay Company. This alone was, in the eyes of the Nor'westers, a sufficient motive for preventing its success.

Therefore those of their servants that were half-breeds employed at Fort Gibraltar, situate at the confluence of the Assiniboine with the Red River,¹⁷ had been persuaded to disguise themselves as Indians, and behave in such a way that they would strike terror into the hearts of the poor Scotch and Irish, none of whom "knew [how] to put a gun to his eye or even fired a shot" in his life.¹⁸

Now the very same men who gratified the newcomers with such hostile demonstrations were those who piloted them to Pembina, winning by their kindness the gratitude of the poor emigrants. When these reached the Red River the halfbreeds "were acting under the influence of the Northwest Company," observes Ross; "but in going to Pembina on the present occasion, they were free and acting for themselves. And here it is worthy of remark that the insolence and overbearing tone of these men when under the eye of their masters [who were Scotch gentlemen] were not more conspicuous than their kind, affable and friendly deportment towards the emigrants when following the impulse of their

¹⁷And founded in 1804.

¹⁸Macdonell to Selkirk, 1st Oct., 1811.



A SHAMAN, OR "MÉDICINE MAN."

own free-will.'’ Hence the Scotch and Irish colonists quite naturally concluded that “when not urged on to mischief by designing men, the natural disposition of the halfbreeds is humble, benevolent, kind and sociable.”¹⁹

The main difficulty that confronted Governor Macdonell was the feeding of so many mouths in a country where not an acre of wheat was probably grown before 1813. The colonists had, that year, been blessed with fair returns for their exertions in the small fields they had cultivated; but they had to wait a full twelvemonth before they could benefit by them. Moreover, new parties were coming, and it became evident that the original inhabitants were secretly instigated by the authorities of the Northwest Company to part with their provisions at exorbitant prices only.

That this heartless policy was not followed as reprisals for Macdonell’s haughtiness, as the Nor’westers afterwards pretended, is made clear by the following passage of a letter written by Wm. Auld, of York Factory, before the governor of the colony had as much as been seen on the banks of the Red River. “I know,” said Auld, “that the Canadians will have a party of men on purpose to precede him [a Mr. Sinclair], to drive and alarm off the buffaloes that he [Macdonell] may be checked in his advance.”²⁰

Under these circumstances, the governor, impelled

¹⁹*Op. cit.*, pp. 22, 23.

²⁰York Factory, to A. Wedderburne, 1st Oct., 1811.

by a sense of his responsibility with regard to so many people entirely dependent on him, thought proper to lay an embargo on such of the provisions in the country as were not actually required for the sustenance of the traders and their men. Claiming to represent the rights of the Earl of Selkirk over the territory, he forbade (January 8, 1814), under the penalty of confiscation the exportation of these provisions during the space of a twelvemonth. They were to be "taken for the use of the Colony," and "paid for by British bills at the customary rate."

The Nor'westers were indignant at this measure, and swore that it should not be carried out. So, in the following spring Macdonell sent, under a double escort, a man named John Spencer to seize the stores which had been accumulated at their fort on Souris River, a high-handed and possibly premature proceeding which served only to make matters worse. The Nor'westers protested, but did not make any resistance. After having broken the doors open with hatchets, Spencer's men seized 500 bags of pemmican, 100 bales of dried meat, and 96 kegs of grease; in all about 60,000 pounds of provisions, which they removed to their own establishment, Brandon House.

Another seizure was made in the winter of 1814-15, on the plains of what is now North Dakota. A party of fifteen men appropriated in the name of the governor the provisions which a French Canadian, named Desmarais, had amassed for the Northwest Company, with the help of a few servants.

These acts of violence, which special couriers brought to the knowledge of all the establishments of that concern, exasperated masters and servitors, the latter especially, who were led to believe that the organizers of the colony—Hudson's Bay Company men—had no other purpose in mind but to drive them from the country where many of them had first seen the light of day.

Unfortunately certain declarations of Lord Selkirk lent colour to these forebodings. Blinded by an excess of zeal for his great philanthropic work, he had written to one of his agents: “We must give them [the Canadian traders] solemn warning that the land belongs to the Hudson's Bay Company, and that they must remove from it; after this warning they should not be allowed to cut any timber either for building or fuel. What they have cut ought to be openly and forcibly seized, and their buildings destroyed. In like manner they should be warned not to fish in your waters, and if they put down nets, seize them as you would in England those of a poacher.”²¹

This letter having fallen into the hands of one of the Northwest Company partners, served to fan the flames of discontent which were already burning at a furious rate. It is not within our province to relate all the acts of aggression and reprisals which followed. Yet for the understanding of what was to happen, events that led to the final establishment of

²¹Gunn, “History of Manitoba,” p. 112. Ottawa, 1880.

the Church in the northwest, it is necessary to mention that a warrant was issued for the arrest of Governor Macdonell, who at first ignored it as being *ultra vires*. Then, on June 25, 1815, the Hudson's Bay Company post on Red River, Fort Douglas, about two miles below the junction of the two streams, was attacked by a troop of halfbreeds under English leaders, at the instigation of the Northwest Company, after nine field pieces had been forcibly taken therefrom during an absence of Miles Macdonell. The outcome of this affray was the wounding of four of the fort's men, one of whom died on the morrow. Another consequence was the dispersion of the settlers, who had to leave for Lake Winnipeg and Scotland, while others were taken to Canada.

Shortly thereafter a band of twenty French Canadians, some of whom had their wives with them, arrived from the east under the lead of a Colin Robertson, a gentleman who had passed from the service of the Northwest to that of the Hudson's Bay Company. That same Robertson immediately coaxed the settlers who had reached Lake Winnipeg into returning to their fields under a promise of protection. Then the band of 100 colonists already referred to arrived with a gentleman, Robert Semple, who had been entrusted with the supervision of all the Hudson's Bay Company's interests in Northern America.

CHAPTER VI.

A CLOUDBURST WITH ULTIMATELY GOOD RESULTS.

1816-1817.

Exhausted by the multiplicity of his cares and the difficulties everyone seemed to throw in his path,¹ Captain Macdonell had asked² to be relieved of his functions, and then had surrendered himself into the hands of his opponents, who took him to Montreal to undergo a trial which never took place. His services, however, were considered too valuable to be dispensed with, and when, in the spring of 1816, he returned to Red River, he remained governor of the colony, while Robert Semple, now his superior, was

¹For instance, he had to bear all the odium of his measure against the exportation of provisions, after the same had been suggested and unanimously approved at York Factory. "It was the decided opinion of every person at York Factory that such a measure would be highly proper. You then *expressed yourself strongly* in favour of it," wrote Macdonell to Auld, who cowardly disavowed all responsibility in the matter, after he had written Macdonell: "I do entirely agree with you in the propriety and justice of preventing the provisions being carried out of your territory without your license, especially after you have given due warning."

²Sept. 2nd, 1814. That Macdonell's services were appreciated by his patron in Scotland is shown by this remark of Lord Selkirk: "The address with which you managed the Highlanders and Irishmen, showing that the latter are not so utterly untamable as some people would have us believe, demands my warmest approbation and leads me to entertain flattering anticipations of the result when you are placed in more favourable circumstances" (14th June, 1813).

Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company in America.³

On March 17, 1816, Colin Robertson, acting governor of the colony during his absence, caused the arrest of Duncan Cameron, a Northwest Company partner, who had been the leading spirit in all the recent machinations of that body, notably in the dispersion of the settlers. Then under pretext of recovering the cannon that belonged to Fort Douglas, he took and razed to the ground Fort Gibraltar, the headquarters of the Nor'westers in the country.

By these open acts of violence it is easy to see that the wrongs were not confined to one side. But we may be permitted to remark that, when following their own inclinations and not misled by their employers, the French stood for peace and legality. The defender of Fort Douglas, when it was so unwarrantedly attacked in June, 1815, plainly states that he secured "the services of free men about the place—French Canadians and halfbreeds not in the service of the Northwest Company—to restore matters and prepare for the future."⁴ Moreover it is

³This is a fact which most authors have overlooked. Even Alexander Ross, in his "List of the Governors of the Red River Colony from the year 1812 to the year 1855" (in "The Red River Settlement," p. 410), says that, in August, 1815, he was succeeded by Alexander McDonell. Yet we shall presently see him asking for priests for the colony as late as April, 1816, and on the 24th of January, 1817, he wrote from *Fort Douglas* to Cuthbert Grant a letter which he signed: Miles Macdonell, Governor, and which is reproduced *in extenso*, p. 158 of the "Report of the Proceedings connected with the Disputes between the Earl of Selkirk and the Northwest Company." He was therefore fully five years governor of the colony, instead of two years and ten months, as Ross would have it.

⁴Bryce, "History of the Hudson's Bay Company," p. 223.

on record that when the so-called free men felt the final storm approaching, they made off for the plains, in order to have no part in it.

This came but too soon. Convinced that Lord Selkirk's directions concerning the expulsion of the Nor'westers were indeed being followed, and that the double seizure of provisions, the destruction of Fort Gibraltar, the taking of Fort Pembina and the imprisoning of its inmates, as well as the attack on Fort Qu'Appelle, which, however, had been successfully resisted, were but part of a plan of extermination, the Northwest Company resolved to go to extremes, in order to save their existence and protect their interests in a land where they had long reigned as almost undisputed masters.

For this purpose they gathered as many half-breeds and French Canadians as they could, and even went to the length of courting the services of the Indians, in order to strike a decisive blow at Hudson's Bay Company domination. An expedition with two cannon was dispatched from their headquarters, Fort William, on Lake Superior, which was to reach a point below Fort Douglas by June 16, 1816.⁵ Another band, composed mainly of French and English halfbreeds with a few French Canadians, aggregating sixty-four persons accompanied by six Indians, was to join them on the same day. Then the combined force would make a desperate attack on Fort Douglas.

⁵This arrived only on the 20th of that month.

In order to pass unperceived, and the more quietly effect their junction with the Fort William brigade, the corps of halfbreeds, which was led by a Cuthbert Grant, had been cautioned to keep as far as possible from the Hudson's Bay Company post. But the swampy nature of the soil forced them to pass within sight of the sentinel, who, noticing that they were mounted and armed, made this circumstance known to Governor Semple.

It was in the afternoon of June 19, 1816.

"We must go and meet these men," declared the governor. "Let twenty men follow me."

This was no doubt a rash move, one which nothing but ignorance of the people and the desperate counsels they were acting on could excuse. Instead of sending out scouts to reconnoitre, Semple went out with twenty-seven men. When a short distance from the fort, perceiving that the horsemen were more numerous than he had thought, he sent for a piece of cannon. This, however, being too slow in coming, the governor proceeded to meet the halfbreeds.

At the sight of the English party, the representatives of the Canadian company drew themselves up in the form of a half-moon. Then one of them, a clerk named François F. Boucher, advanced towards the governor, making signs that he wanted to speak.

"What do you want?" he asked when within speaking distance.

"What do you want yourselves?" said Semple.

"We want our fort," answered Boucher.

"Well, go to your fort."

"You rascal, you have destroyed it," cried out the Canadian.

The two men were now close to one another. On being addressed in this coarse strain, the governor, who was of a refined nature and had always been treated with consideration, could not contain his indignation.

"Scoundrel!" he exclaimed, "do you tell me so?"

Which saying he caught with one hand the bridle of Boucher's horse, and laid the other on his gun. Then, turning to some of his men:

"Make him prisoner," he said.⁶

Thereupon the Nor'wester jumped off to the ground. At the same time a shot was fired, which killed one of the English officers, a Mr. Holt. Boucher then returned to his friends, and almost immediately the governor fell, wounded. At the sight of the consequences of his imprudence he cried out:

"Do what you can to take care of yourselves."

But the shooting was now general. As Semple's men, instead of acting on his advice, persisted in surrounding their master to ascertain the extent of the harm done him, they became an easy target for the halfbreeds. In a short time they were all dead

⁶In her valuable work, "The Conquest of the Great Northwest," vol. II., p. 172, Agnes C. Laut makes François Firmin Boucher the "son of the scout shot on the South Saskatchewan." The erudite author must be mistaken in this, as the contemporaneous records expressly say that his father was a respectable proprietor of Montreal.

or wounded, with the exception of five or six who had managed to retire from the battlefield.

Sad to relate, most of the wounded were massacred by the infuriated Indians. Even some half-breeds stooped to the rôle of butchers of their fellow men. Thus a Mr. Rogers was killed by a Scotch halfbreed as he begged for mercy.

Meanwhile the governor was lying on his side, with his thigh broken and supporting his head on his hand.

“Are you not Mr. Grant?” he asked a passing halfbreed.

Receiving an affirmative answer, Semple went on to say:

“I am not mortally wounded, and if you could get me conveyed to the fort, I think I could live.”

Cuthbert Grant promised to do so, and left him in the care of a kind French Canadian. But just then an Indian came up.

“You dog, you are the cause of the whole trouble; take this,” he grunted, as he shot poor Semple in the breast.

Not far from there, an Englishman named John Pritchard was about to be slain. In the twinkling of an eye, he recognized a French Canadian among those who surrounded him.

“Lavigne,” he prayed, calling him by his name, “you are a Frenchman, you are a man, you are a Christian. For God’s sake, save my life. I give myself up; I am your prisoner.”

This pathetic appeal was not lost on the Canadian. Placing himself between Pritchard and his assailants, Lavigne succeeded, at the peril of his own life, to draw him away to a place of safety.⁷

The storm which had been brewing for so many years, beyond the soothing influence of religion, had at last swept over the land. The cloudburst resulted in twenty-one killed on the one side,⁸ and one, with four wounded, on the other. Moreover Fort Douglas had to be evacuated, in order to prevent a massacre which Cuthbert Grant freely threatened.

Such was the unfortunate affair which became known in history as the Battle of Seven Oaks.⁹

⁷The foregoing dialogues and accompanying details are strictly historical. Their authenticity is fully warranted by the sworn depositions of witnesses and participants, as well as other contemporaneous sources. John Pritchard was born (1777) in Shropshire, England, though some call him a Scotchman. After some years passed in the service of the Northwest Company, he cast in his lot with its rivals in 1815. Later on he became a member of the Council of Assiniboia, and died at Kildonan in 1856.

⁸Of whom at least seven were Irish. Mr. J. P. Bourke, the store-keeper, was wounded, but escaped death by flight. He was shortly after caught by a Mr. McLeod, of the Northwest Company, who made him prisoner and sent him to Fort William.

⁹The fate of Semple and his companions is certainly calculated to claim our sympathy. Yet such a sentiment should not interfere with the historian's duty to give everyone his due, as we believe it has in the cases of such writers as G. Dugas and G. Bryce. Despite the fact that there was undeniable premeditation on the part of the Northwest Company, it is quite clear that the governor of the rival body had to blame his own rashness for that melancholy event. Apart from his imprudence in sallying out of his fort without having ascertained the intentions of the halfbreeds or even attempted to make sure of their numbers, he had previously answered by what we cannot help calling bravado the undisguised threats of his adversaries. Thus, on March 23, 1816, we find him writing from Brandon, in a curt note to Alexander McDonell, a Northwest Company partner: "I suspect that your associates have mistaken my character. Remember what I now say to you: Should you, or your Indian or black-breed (*sic*) allies,

Apprized of this crowning disaster to his pet colony, Lord Selkirk, who had come to Eastern Canada, at once levied a troop of disbanded soldiers called Meurons after one of their former colonels, hastened with them to Fort William, which he captured, and then made for Red River, where he arrived three months after his men, that is, in the last week of June, 1817. Then, after having retaken Fort Douglas, he applied himself to the task of settling up matters that had lain in abeyance, extinguished by treaties the Indian title to his territory, and offered lands therein to the soldiers who chose to stay.

Many of these were Catholics, and among them were Germans, French, Italians and Swiss. It is perhaps for this reason that Alexander Ross terms them "a rough and lawless set of blackguards."¹⁰ Yet, as late as July 26th of the preceding year, the Governor of Canada, Sir John Sherbrooke, had publicly congratulated them "on having by their conduct in the Canadas, maintained the reputation which they had deservedly acquired by their former services," mentioning especially as worthy of all

attempt any violence against the Hudson's Bay Company at Qu'Appelle or elsewhere, the consequences to yourselves will be terrible." Again, on May 14th of the same year, he thus ends a longer letter to the same party: "I also, should I be compelled to it, have my schemes of farther and still farther retaliation, the shock of which, if I mistake not, should be felt from Athabasca to Montreal" ("Report of the Proceedings connected with the Disputes between the Earl of Selkirk and the North-West Company," p. 113. London, 1819).

¹⁰"The Red River Settlement," p. 41.

praise "the steadiness, discipline and efficiency of these corps."¹¹

Most of the Meurons that remained in the country were Germans. They settled on what is now called the Seine River (St. Boniface), which for some time was known for that reason as German Creek.

It was now but too evident to the Earl of Selkirk that, without the powerful arm of religion, the best plans for an undertaking like his would come to naught. For six weary years he had been obliged to go on without the aid of even one clergyman among his colonists and the restless population in the midst of which they had established themselves. The results had been most disastrous. And now that the ranks of the Catholics had been swollen by the arrival of French Canadian families and the accession of his Meurons, the people of that faith must number some three-quarters of the entire population. A Catholic priest, therefore, he must have at any cost, if the work of his heart is to be endowed with any degree of stability.

For the lack of any ordained clergyman, Miles Macdonell had seen himself in the necessity of acting in that capacity whenever this was possible. "I married last winter two young men of our servants to the daughters of settlers and baptized four infant children born among us," he wrote to His Lordship on July 25, 1814. Then came the invariable refrain: "I trust the arrival of some clergyman soon will

¹¹Bryce, "History of the Hudson's Bay Company," p. 239.

relieve me from the performance of this awful task.”¹²

This clergyman, it was now evident, should not be sought in Ireland. Besides the failure to find one there which Lord Selkirk had already confessed, there was the question of language, as well as that of jurisdiction. These vast countries, though ecclesiastically unorganized, were under the Bishop of Quebec. Then at least nine-tenths of the Catholics they contained had French for their mother tongue.

Fortunately there was then at the head of that important diocese a man who had nothing so much at heart as the extension of the kingdom of God, Monseigneur Joseph Octave Plessis, a superior mind, who was as zealous for the conversion of souls in foreign or distant parts as for the sanctification of those nearer home. He had already turned his eyes towards the west, and, as early as 1815, he had made overtures to the Northwest Company with a view to obtaining the necessary facilities for a missionary trip to Lac la Pluie, or Rainy Lake. He had originally intended to take this task upon himself; but circumstances forced him to entrust it with one of his priests.

After consulting with Mr. McGillivray and other magnates of the Northwest Company, he had received a satisfactory reply from Mr. Angus Shaw, writing in the name of the great corporation.¹³

¹²Which is good evidence that the first baptisms and marriages performed in Manitoba were celebrated according to the Catholic rite.

¹³Montreal, 7th Nov., 1815.

This journey was to take place in the summer of 1816. But before the bishop could execute his project, Miles Macdonell addressed him in the early spring a letter which caused a change in his plans. After thanking Providence for the preservation of the infant colony by the banks of the Red River, "notwithstanding the unparalleled barbarities practised to effect its annihilation," the governor went on to plead thus:

"You know, Monseigneur, that there can be no stability in the government of states or kingdoms unless religion is made the corner-stone. The leading motive of my first undertaking the management of that arduous, tho' laudable, enterprise, was to have made the Catholic religion the prevailing faith of the establishment, should Divine Providence think me a worthy instrument to forward the design. The Earl of Selkirk's liberal mind readily acquiesced in bringing out along with me the first year a priest from Ireland. Your Lordship already knows the unfortunate result of that first attempt.

"Our spiritual wants increase with our numbers; we have many Catholics from Scotland and Ireland,¹⁴ and besides those Canadians are always with us; we are to have a vast accession from here. There are hundreds of free Canadians wandering about our colony, who have families with Indian women, all of whom are in the most deplorable state for want

¹⁴A further proof that our claim is well founded that the number of Catholics among the original emigrants from Europe to the Red River was not inconsiderable.

of spiritual aids. A vast religious harvest might also be made among the natives round us, whose language is that of the Algonquins of this country, and who are tractable and well disposed considering the corruption of morals introduced among them by opposition traders and other corruptive habits.

"I have learnt with great pleasure that you are sending two missionaries this year as far as Lac la Pluie. I shall be happy to afford a passage from here¹⁵ in my canoe to one of these gentlemen as far as Red River, which is only six days' journey from there, and should he remain permanently with us, the concern shall furnish him a suitable conveyance once a year to meet his fellow labourers in the Christian vineyard at Lac la Pluie."¹⁶

These were indeed Christian sentiments! The noble founder of the colony, Lord Selkirk himself, though not a Catholic, did not deem it beneath his dignity to join in them, and to strongly second Macdonell's request in a communication which accompanied his letter. "I am fully persuaded of the infinite good which might be effected by a zealous and intelligent ecclesiastic among these people [the Canadians], among whom the sense of religion is almost entirely lost," he wrote. "It would give me very great satisfaction to coöperate to the utmost of

¹⁵Montreal.

¹⁶Montreal, 4th April, 1816. Miles Macdonell left Red River in the course of 1817, and died in 1828, on a farm he had acquired at Osnaburg, Upper Canada. The terrible experiences he had gone through left on his mind an indelible impress which probably hastened his death.

my power in so good a work; and if Your Lordship will select a suitable person to undertake it, I can have no difficulty in assuring him of every accommodation and support which Your Lordship may judge necessary.”

Such earnest appeals could not be left unheeded. Bishop Plessis answered by the next courier that, pursuant to his laudable designs, the Rev. Pierre A. Tabeau, a Canadian priest “of robust health, serious character, remarkable intelligence, full of zeal and good will,” would accompany Mr. Macdonell as far as Red River, in a voyage of observation, and with orders to report on the advisability of establishing there a permanent mission.¹⁷

Rev. Pierre Antoine Tabeau was a native of Montreal, where he was born in the course of 1782. Ordained priest, October, 1805, after a somewhat boisterous youth, at the end of which his real merit had triumphed over dispositions which had first induced his superiors to fear for his vocation,¹⁸ he was named one of the curates of the cathedral parish of Quebec, where he likewise filled the post of organist. Then he was appointed parish priest of Ste.

¹⁷To Lord Selkirk, 8th April, 1816.

¹⁸Rev. Mr. Roux, Vicar-General of Montreal, had the following concerning Tabeau in a letter to Bishop Plessis (24th May, 1803): “He seemed a little dissipated; but after all, I believe he will become a good subject. If in good company, he will prove a fervent priest.” Over two years later the vicar-general was glad to see that he had been a good prophet. In a letter to the same prelate, dated 13th Oct., 1805, he says: “We have all been most edified by his conduct during his stay at Montreal, especially in the course of the retreat. That young man has talent, health, virtue, and the probability is that he will render service to the Church.”

Anne desPlaines, which he reached by the end of 1810. Three years later (September, 1813), he was transferred to St.-Jean-Port-Joli, and received afterwards an appointment to the parish of Boucherville.

Bishop Plessis advised in due time Mr. A. Shaw of his change of plans, and told him of the proposed journey to the seat of the unhappy divisions, adding, as if to forestall objections on the part of the Northwest Company: "The angel of peace I send you has for mission to make himself useful to all, without siding with any."¹⁹

Conformably to this plan, Rev. Mr. Tabeau left for the Red River; but, having learned at Rainy Lake of the massacre of June 19th, he thought it perfectly useless to go and broach the subject of a Catholic mission in a land tormented by such discord. Returning east, he took his time before sending in his report, which was adverse to any permanent establishment at Red River. Periodical visitations, he thought, were to be sufficient under the circumstances.

But the very reasons which deterred Tabeau from the idea of a foundation strongly urged the Earl of Selkirk to leave no stone unturned until one was secured. Before the priest's document could reach the Bishop of Quebec, Lord Selkirk who, as we have seen, had gone to the Red River in the summer of 1817, caused a formal petition for missionaries to

¹⁹May 6th, 1816.

be circulated in his colony and forwarded to Mgr. Plessis. Therein a reference was made to the unfortunate occurrences of the past year, the burden of which was laid at the doors of the employers of the halfbreeds, as the latter had been made to believe that it was their bounden duty to drive away the English before they were driven off by them. Nearly all the Christian population, either Canadian free-men or new settlers, were of the Roman Catholic faith, it was declared. Hence the bishop was besought to send them a priest.

This document was signed by twenty French Canadians and three Scotchmen. It was witnessed to by a Louis Nolin and Mr. Pierre Chrysologue Pambrun, one of the principal clerks of the Hudson's Bay Company, who had been arrested by the Nor'westers a few days before the Battle of Seven Oaks. A Mr. Samuel Gale was entrusted with the petition, who added his prayers to those of the signers, and suggested that a subscription be forthwith started on behalf of the proposed mission.²⁰

Coming after such highly recommended entreaties, Mr. Tabeau had little chance of obtaining the ear of the bishop. In spite of his temporizing counsels, Mgr. Plessis wrote him, March 8, 1818, that he now realized it was a permanent mission that was needed, remarking at the same time: "If, in order to labour for the salvation of these poor Christians we must wait until both companies have sealed a peace which

²⁰Samuel Gale to Bishop Plessis, 29th Jan., 1818.

probably neither thinks it in its interests to seek, nothing will be done before ten years, and perhaps more.”

Bishop Plessis may appear pessimistic to such as do not fully grasp the situation of that distracted land at the time he was writing. No one could then have foreseen that within three years all sources of trouble would have been eliminated by the fusion of the two contending parties into one homogeneous body under the name of the Hudson’s Bay Company. But it is within the bounds of probabilities that the Catholic mission contributed largely towards the happy result by rendering impossible such acts of violence as had disgraced whites and halfbreeds alike. A peaceful contest being practically out of the question, the disappearance of one of the two companies was a matter of necessity.²¹

The outcome of it all was the sending west of the two priests that were to found the Church of St. Boniface.

²¹The coalition of the two companies took place on March 26th, 1821.

CHAPTER VII.

FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH OF ST. BONIFACE.

1818-1820.

The man who was to be God's instrument in establishing the Church in the Middle West was the Rev. Joseph Norbert Provencher. Born at Nicolet, in Lower Canada, February 12, 1787, he had been ordained to the priesthood on December 21, 1811, and had at first filled the office of assistant to the curé of a parish in the city of Quebec. In 1814 he had been appointed to the parish of Pointe Claire, near Montreal, and two years later Mgr. Plessis promoted him to that of Kamouraska. He was at the head of that parish when he received the first intimation that his ecclesiastical superior had cast his eyes on him for the direction of the remote Red River mission.

This was indeed a far from tempting offer. All Canada was afire with the reports of the atrocities committed in the west: would he have tact enough to steer his bark clear of the reefs that must lay in wait for the mariner in that sea of endless conflicts? Moreover he was not familiar with English; could scarcely travel on account of a painful infirmity; had debts which he was in honour bound to pay without delay, while the insufficiency of tithes that year made

this an impossibility. Nevertheless, he was willing to second the views of his bishop; for, he said, "if that mission was postponed on my account, I should apprehend reproaches from God and men."¹

But Mr. Provencher was the elect of Bishop Plessis. He had therefore to submit, and press back into his heart the protestations of his humility. As soon as a companion had been found for him in the person of Rev. Joseph Nicolas Sévère Dumoulin,² the Bishop of Quebec sent to all the parish priests of his immense diocese—then the only one within the whole of Canada—a circular asking for contributions towards the establishment of the Red River mission.³ Then he bestowed on Mr. Provencher the powers of a vicar-general, and addressed to the two missionaries full directions as to the line of conduct they were to follow in the pursuance of their sacred enterprise.⁴

¹Kamouraska, 15th March, 1818. Provencher's debts amounted to £252.12.9. It speaks well for the esteem in which he was held at Kamouraska that one of his parishioners, a Mr. A. Dionne, then wrote to Mgr. Plessis: "I have never craved so much for wealth as at this time, in order that I might set him at ease on that score" (*Histoire des Familles Têtu, Bonenfant, Dionne et Perrault, par Mgr. Henri Têtu*, p. 467. Quebec, 1898). Yet, humanly speaking, Provencher might have had reasons of his own to wish for a change in the scene of his labours; for at Kamouraska he had encountered the opposition of a few busybodies who had thwarted his plans. But Mr. Dionne positively stated in the same letter: "The tears which were shed in the church . . . when respectable Mr. Provencher announced his departure for Red River are unmistakable tokens of the good he has done in this parish during the short time he has directed it. They have well proved that he is regretted by all, without excepting those who tormented him last year."

²Born at Ste. Anne, Isle of Montreal, 5th Dec., 1793, and ordained 23rd Feb., 1817. He had studied at the Seminary of Nicolet.

³March 29th, 1818.

⁴April 20th, 1818.

The future apostles were expected to learn the dialects of their Indian neophytes and prepare grammars and dictionaries of the same. They will have to regularize the unions of the French Canadians with native women; preach the word of God and strive to enforce His laws; but above all they shall watch with a jealous eye over the education of youth, and establish schools wherever practicable. Then the preacher of the famous sermon on the defeat of the French forces by Nelson's squadron⁵ reveals himself in the ninth clause of their "marching orders": "They shall tell the people of the advantages they enjoy in living under the government of His Britannic Majesty, teaching them by word and example the respect and fidelity they owe to the Sovereign."⁶

And as it was feared lest the Northwest Company should try to thwart the work of conciliation of the two priests, the prelate obtained from them testimonials from Sir John Cape Sherbrooke, "Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief in and over the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada." These

⁵Ever since the cession of Canada to Great Britain the Bishops of Quebec had never succeeded in having their title recognized by the English authorities. They were even forbidden to assume it officially. Rev. J. O. Plessis, who had been named coadjutor to the bishop of that city, preached that sermon with a view to conciliating the English element in Canada. For the first time since the end of the French regime he had the bishop called by his official name on the pamphlet which contained the prelate's mandement, or pastoral charge, together with his own sermon.

⁶We shall have many a fact to record which goes to show how faithfully this direction was followed by the representatives of the Catholic Church in the Middle West of Canada.

were dated April 29, 1818. Owing to the importance of the party that delivered them, we hereby reproduce them from the original:

“Whereas the Reverends Joseph Norbert Provencher, Severe Joseph Nicolas Dumoulin and Guillaume Etienne Edge have been appointed by the most Reverend the Roman Catholic Bishop of Quebec as missionaries to the Red River and the adjacent Indian territories, . . . I do hereby call on all His Majesty’s subjects, civil and military, and do request all other persons whomsoever to whom these Presents shall come not only to permit the said missionaries to pass without hindrance or molestation, but to render them all good offices, assistance and protection wherever they shall find it necessary to go in the exercise of their holy calling.”

Moreover, at the suggestion of Lord Selkirk, who feared the hostility of the Northwest Company and its agents, the same Governor of both Canadas gave them for escort Captain the Chevalier Charles de Lorimier, of the Indian Department, a man who was known and respected by everybody. Then, the better to ensure the future of the mission they were to found, the noble lord endowed it, “in consideration of the sum of five shillings of good and lawful money of the Province of Lower Canada,”⁷ with a seignory of five miles by four at the mouth of the Seine River on the east side of the Red, nearly opposite to the

⁷In the indenture signed on the 19th of May, it is stated that the grant was made “in consideration of the sum of five pounds.”

mouth of the Assiniboine. To this he added, on the west side of the Red, a piece of land fifteen chains square.

This measure was, of course, intended for the benefit of the mission itself, not for interests of a private nature. But to the persons of the missionaries themselves Lord Selkirk gave unmistakable marks of esteem during a stay they had to make in Montreal, while they were getting everything in readiness for their momentous journey. Nor was he alone in his kind attentions to them. Lady Selkirk herself left nothing untried in order to be of assistance to them. "I never saw a lady so learned, so witty and so obliging," wrote Mr. Dumoulin to his bishop. "She has gone beyond all bounds in order to get us all we might need, and this with such a constantly good grace that all her attentions are thereby doubled in value. It seems that Milord never does anything without consulting her."⁸ Provencher was not less sensible to the lady's kindness. "The Countess of Selkirk has prepared us a beautiful chapel," he writes, "and she proposes to do even more."⁹

It is simple justice to the memory of the noble couple that the Catholics of the west and elsewhere should know what their Church owes to them.

Thus provided with safeguards against all pos-

⁸Montreal, 30th Aug., 1818.

⁹Montreal, 1818 (no other date). A chapel is, in missionary parlance, a set of priestly vestments and all the other requisites to say mass with.

sible obstacles, the two missionaries, with their young assistant, bade farewell to Montreal, May 19, 1818. Their route lay along the Ottawa, which they ascended until the Mattawa was reached; then through Lake Nipissing to Lakes Huron and Superior as far as Fort William. After the Kaministiquia had been poled up to the height of land, there was a succession of unconnected sheets of water necessitating long and tedious portages to Cross Lake. Thence progress was more easy, as they had only to descend the streams and traverse Lakes la Pluie (or Rainy) and of the Woods to the mouth of the Winnipeg River. After some thirty miles of canoeing to the mouth of the Red, this was ascended to the point of destination.

At Lake Nipissing Messrs. Provencher and Du-moulin had a foretaste of the morals introduced among the Indians by the rivalry of the traders. The dusky children of the lakes were very civil; in return for the good counsels of the priests they offered them fish and asked for . . . rum, loudly manifesting their surprise when told that the latter had none.

June 20th they reached the famous Fort William, where the commander, Mr. de Rocheblave, greeted them with the powerful voice of his cannon.

The sixteenth of that same month was indeed a red letter day for the Catholics of Red River. A motley crowd of all ages and conditions, mostly French Canadians and halfbreeds, had been gath-

ered by special courier, and thronged the grounds of Fort Douglas. Suddenly, at about five o'clock in the afternoon, two canoes were seen painfully poling up the river.

"Here they are!" cried a voice on top the bank.

"Here they are!" repeated a hundred throats by the fort.

Useless to explain that *they* were the missionaries, who shortly afterwards briskly walked up in their black robes, kindly and smiling to the people that were to be their flock. Both priests were of a commanding presence, tall and of a gentlemanly bearing.¹⁰ They made a profound impression on everybody, not excepting Alexander Macdonell, who had succeeded Miles Macdonell at the head of the colony. After they had addressed a few words to the Canadians and others, some of whom wept for joy at the sight of the almost forgotten ecclesiastical costume, while the halfbreeds were awe-struck at the appearance and deportment of the men of God, the governor of the colony tendered them a generous, though necessarily frugal, hospitality. Prior to their leaving the east, the two priests had beaten up recruits for the Hudson's Bay Company and the colony among the French Canadians.¹¹ As a result of their exertions seven large canoes with about forty Canadians, some with their families, followed the missionaries, under the lead of a John McLeod.

¹⁰Provencher was six feet four and very handsome.

¹¹John McLeod's Memoir.

une fois toujours en devoir de communiquer votre gran-
deur les observations que dans et les circonstances m'amenèrent
à faire au père pasteur, en attendant que l'en aie faites
intervenant à faire, je vous avoue avec sincérité, permettre
que j'envoie soussignées avec le plus profond respect.

De votre grandeur

Le très humble
et très obéissant serviteur,

Provenercher priez Dieu pour le général

Du 1^{er} Octobre Dauglan
à la rivière Rouge
le 13 Aout 1818.

VICAR-GENERAL PROVENCHER'S AUTOGRAPH AND SIGNATURE.

"This is indeed a fine country," wrote Rev. Mr. Provencher; "the river is fairly large. It has a border of oaks, elms, poplars, aspens, etc. Beyond this fringe of wood extend prairies as far as the eye can reach. . . . The soil seems excellent."

This was written to Bishop Plessis, on the morrow of the missionaries' arrival. Mr. Provencher waited a little in order to be in a position to take in the situation from a moral standpoint. It was not encouraging. Speaking of the native population, he wrote on September 13, 1818: "It can be said without hesitation that their commerce with the whites, instead of advancing them towards civilization, has served only to drive them away therefrom, because the whites have spoiled their morals by the strong drinks of which the natives are extraordinarily fond, and they have taught them debauchery by their bad examples. Most of the employees have children by women whom they afterwards send away to the first newcomer. . . . All the clerks and *bourgeois* likewise have squaws, and, what is worse, no more care is taken of the children born of these would-be marriages than if they had no souls.¹²

TRANSLATION.

I shall ever consider it a duty to communicate to Your Lordship the observations which time and circumstances will allow me henceforth to make. Pending some more interesting to send to Your Lordship, permit me to subscribe myself with the most profound respect,

Of Your Lordship the most humble and most obedient servant,
Provencher, priest, vicar-general.

From Fort Douglass, at Red River, the 13th of August, 1818.

¹²Fort Douglas, 13th Sept., 1818.

This state of things on the banks of the Red River forebode plenty of work and perhaps some trouble for the missionaries. But they welcomed work. Their first care was to provide themselves with some sort of habitation, wherein to pass the winter. With logs of aspen they built a house fifty by thirty, part of which was at first utilized as a chapel. Less than two months after their arrival, they had already baptized no less than seventy-two children, one of whom was a little Sauteux girl who died shortly after her baptism; so that it was to an Indian that they first opened the gates of heaven.¹³

At that date, August 12, 1818, they were still busy preparing other children for their admission into the Church, and instructing the Indian women with a view to baptizing and marrying them. The squaws proved to be of good-will, but slow in learning on account of their generally advanced age and imperfect knowledge of French.

On the day that Provencher was thus describing the work of the missionaries, the French Canadians they had recruited for the west in Lower Canada came up. They intended to settle in the proximity of Fort Douglas. But clouds of grasshoppers had just swarmed over the doomed colony, and eaten up the crops that had so far been full of promise. Discouraged at the sight of the havoc, they made for Pembina, about sixty miles up the Red River. Mr.

¹³The second burial, the first of an adult, was that of the son of the interpreter Brousse, which took place on Aug. 29th, 1818.

Provencher found himself in the necessity of sending thither his confrère, Rev. Mr. Dumoulin, with the young ecclesiastic Edge. Pembina being nearer to the haunts of the buffalo, contained already quite a population of French Canadians and halfbreeds. Mr. Dumoulin put his hand to the plough with a will, and, not content with instructing the people in the science of heaven, he imparted to them some knowledge of the things of the earth by means of a school managed by his companion, Mr. Edge. This soon boasted some sixty pupils, and could have counted eighty but for the distance of the buffalo herds which the parents had to follow.¹⁴

His zeal for the instruction of his people carried him still further. Having come upon a young Canadian named Legacé, who had had a fairly good education, he induced some of the freemen of the plains to engage his services as a school teacher to their children. Legacé went to winter in one of the largest camps, and he soon had more pupils than even Mr. Edge.¹⁵

At Pembina, by the beginning of 1819, Mr. Dumoulin had conferred fifty-two baptisms and rehabilitated a number of marriages among the three hundred persons he had with him. The vicar-general (Mr. Provencher) could not, therefore, hesitate in giving his consent to the building of a house for the

¹⁴Letter from Mr. Provencher, 5th Jan., 1819.

¹⁵From the same to Bishop Plessis; Pembina, 14th Feb., 1819.

missionary and a chapel for the faithful of that outpost.

While the Church was thus implanting herself on the banks of the Red River, the mission of Fort William, for which the Northwest Company is believed to have asked as early as 1814, was not neglected, though no permanent missionary establishment was made in the locality for quite a number of years. It had been entrusted to Rev. Mr. Tabeau, who, for reasons of an honourable character,¹⁶ had declined the foundation of that of Red River. From his post at Boucherville he periodically repaired for a time to Sault Ste. Marie and Fort William. In this mission he was granted an aid, August 13, 1818, in the person of Rev. Mr. Crevier, then assistant priest at Detroit, who was directed by Bishop Plessis to make there an apostolic excursion on behalf of the Indians and the French and English Canadians who frequented or dwelt in the two posts.

On March 11th of the following year (1819), Mr. Tabeau received another letter from his bishop, wherein he was consulted concerning the terms he considered proper to offer to prospective servants for the Red River mission. It appears that those hired on the spot by Mr. Provencher were lacking in honesty and morality. Through the intervention of Mr. Dionne, the good prelate had already secured "five nice boys, all of Kamouraska." He added

¹⁶The author of the *Panthéon Canadien*, Art. Tabeau, asserts that he died Bishop-elect of Spiga, 18th Dec., 1834.

that he counted on the parish priest of Boucherville for the continuation of the Fort William mission commenced the preceding year, as well as on his collaborator, Mr. Crevier. At the same time he admitted that he had vainly attempted to ascertain how the enterprise was viewed by the directors of the Northwest Company. After they had suggested it themselves, it was feared that the Red River foundation, which had been made under the auspices of their opponents in the trade, had considerably damped their ardour for that of Fort William.

Left alone at the Forks, as the environs of Fort Douglas were still called, Mr. Provencher, in pre-vision of the forthcoming winter, exerted himself in hurrying the building of his humble lodgings. He stooped to the most menial tasks in the assistance he lent his workmen. That part of his house which was to be used as a temporary chapel was finished for All Saints' Day, 1818, when he held the first service in it.¹⁷ This he put under the patronage of St. Boniface, in order to draw God's blessings on the German Meurons, Catholics none too fervent, through the intercession of the Apostle of their nation.¹⁸ By extension the name was soon applied to the little Catholic settlement on the banks of the Seine.

¹⁷It is on record that the day Provencher opened his first chapel on the Red River, three children, Jean-Baptiste Lagimodière, Reine Lagimodière and Josette Houle, made their first communion, while a Meuron soldier named Rodger was married to Marguerite Lagimodière.

¹⁸Letter from Provencher to Bishop Plessis; Pembina, 14th Feb., 1819.

January 15, 1819, is the very first time that we see that place thus denominated in Provencher's correspondence. He had just gone to pay a visit to his confrère at Pembina. He then mentions that, apart from his own combination of a house and chapel, which was still unfinished, he had prepared the material, oak logs with outside sawed off, for a regular church eighty feet long, which he intended to erect at St. Boniface.

He adds: "We are always on good terms with both companies. The Nor'westers are ever ready to render us all the services in their power." Then comes the significant statement that "the Hudson's Bay Company people are not so obliging."¹⁹ He ends with a subject which is as near his heart as it is in the case of Mr. Dumoulin. "Already," he says, "if we had sisters for the education of the girls, they would find something to do here. . . . I do not believe it inopportune to think of this."

During the following March Mr. Provencher undertook a much more important journey than that to Pembina. He went by dog-train to visit the trading posts at Qu'Appelle River, some three hundred miles from St. Boniface, and on the Souris River. There he had the consolation of baptizing forty children of Canadians and of hearing the confessions of all the Catholic servants, who were quite numerous at both places.

On his return, he sent his confrère to give a mis-

¹⁹Pembina, 15th Jan., 1819.

sion at Rainy Lake, where the employees of the northern traders repaired every year. These were the first in a series of apostolic excursions whereby the two missionaries gradually took possession of the country in the name of Christ. In the course of these the main posts existing at the time received their visit, and in the spring of 1820 Mr. Dumoulin went as far as Hudson Bay.

Reverting to the headquarters of the mission itself, we obtain through one of the vicar-general's letters a glimpse of the extreme penury that characterized his home. His heart had indeed been gladdened by the arrival of a 100-pound bell sent him from London by the Earl of Selkirk.²⁰ But, not only was there not a crumb of bread on his table months in and months out, but he had scarcely any flour for making hosts for the Holy Sacrifice, and his provision of wine for the same was getting low.

Apart from the hardships of a material order to which he had to submit, difficulties arising from the apathy of demoralized Indians and the obduracy of some Canadians and not a few Germans accustomed to the grossest licentiousness were great trials for the missionaries. At St. Boniface proper, another source of anxiety, demanding a still greater watchfulness on the part of the pastor, arose from the coming of Rev. John West, an Anglican clergyman sent out from England to minister to the spiritual needs of the Presbyterians of the settlement (Octo-

²⁰Provencher to Plessis, 24th Nov., 1819.

ber 4, 1820). For some time these people did not appreciate his services, owing to differences in faith and especially in liturgy from what they had been accustomed to in Scotland. Unable to do much with them, he turned his attention to Provencher's people. In a little book wherein he relates his doings during the three years that he stayed in the colony, Mr. West mentions the case of a Canadian²¹ whom he married to a Swiss Protestant woman.²²

This question of mixed marriages was for some time a thorn in the side of the missionaries. Owing to the great ignorance of the people and the ease with which matrimonial unions had been contracted prior to their arrival, it called for special vigilance. In the above mentioned case Mr. Provencher deemed it his duty to admonish the guilty party of the gravity of his transgression. Hence a sanctimonious horror on the part of the minister, who writes in his journal: "These circumstances prove that Popery, as it now exists, at least in this quarter of the globe, is not contrary to what it was in the days of the Reformation."²³ Some there are who will doubtless add that it is not likely to change to please heterodox preachers even unto the consummation of the world.

West was anything but a High Church clergyman. He revered "our blessed reformers," and seems to

²¹At that time, and long after, that expression meant a French-Canadian.

²²"The Substance of a Journal during a Residence at the Red River Colony," p. 74. London, 1824. Several Catholic Meurons were likewise married outside the Church!

²³*Ibid.*, p. 76.

have considered that, once a person of any or no faith had accepted a copy of his Bible, though that person may have been unable to read or understand it, he had a passport which would infallibly open to him the gates of heaven. His chief aim was therefore to make proselytes by that means, but he had finally to desist in the face of the ridicule he drew on himself by coaxing into accepting his Bibles half-breeds who did not know them from a cook book.²⁴ Even at Red River it was felt that the age of fetishes was gone.

Despite the depreciatory remarks of that minister concerning the lack of influence of the Catholic clergy, it was soon noticed that peace and order were beginning to reign where chaos and the fiercest passions had previously held sway. "The Protestants of this place are extremely pleased with our mission," wrote Mr. Dumoulin to Mgr. Plessis. "They seem to take the keenest interest in it, especially

²⁴On p. 79 of West's Journal the author claims that, on a certain day of February, 1822, some Swiss emigrants "attended divine service on the Sabbath during [his stay at Pembina] and expressed much gratitude for [his] reading to them the French Testament and the ministerial duties [he] performed among them." Mr. West must have had very special aptitudes for the acquisition of languages, or the thanks of the Swiss must have been prompted more by a sense of recognition of his good-will than by their satisfaction at the success of his performance. For, about a year before, that gentleman had asked Mr. Destroismaisons to teach him French in return for English lessons, and the latter had been dissuaded from acceding to his request (Dumoulin to Bishop Plessis, 6th Jan., 1821). Would it be impossible to see in this refusal one of the reasons for that bitterness against the Catholic priests of Red River which pervades the minister's Journal?

It appears from a letter in Provencher's handwriting, of the 29th Nov., 1822, that, at that date, Mr. West "had no chapel as yet, but only a school house, with a teacher and a dozen pupils."

Col. Dickson. He professes to be delighted with our labours and writes often to England about them. On Christmas Day I admitted his daughter to her first communion, as well as Miss Powell, whose father is a Protestant.²⁵

This salutary influence of the priests on behalf of peace in places where, but a short time before, it was so little known, is further emphasized by the continued contests ending in disorders and deeds of violence that were just then stirring to the utmost the representatives of both companies in far-off Athabasca, where the hand of religion could not reach.

On May 25, 1821, as many as 313 baptisms, 53 marriages and 31 funerals were to the credit of the mission at Pembina, while the school was prosperous under the direction of a Mr. Sauvé, another unordained ecclesiastic who had even six scholars studying latin grammar.

Meantime, the vicar-general had found it incumbent on himself to proceed to Quebec, in order to report on the progress of his mission, and also that he might avert a measure of the greatest import to himself and the Red River Settlement. Unwilling to leave Mr. Dumoulin alone in that far-off land, he had previously secured the services of a new missionary. This was Rev. Mr. Destroismaisons who, ordained October 17, 1819, arrived at Red River accompanied by Mr. Sauvé. What the nature of the above mentioned measure was we shall presently see.

²⁵January 6th, 1821.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST BISHOP OF THE WEST.

1821-1829.

In founding the Church of St. Boniface, the ecclesiastical authorities were not without foreseeing that, owing to the immense distance intervening between Red River and Quebec, it could not long exist without having a bishop at its head. In fact, it would seem as if this natural evolution of all similar establishments had been hinted at in presence of Mr. Provencher. Less than two months after his arrival at the "Forks," we find him mentioning the subject in a letter to Bishop Plessis. "This country is still very young to have a bishop," he remarks. . . . "There is one thing which it would perhaps be good to take into consideration, it is that the choice of the first pastor might more appropriately fall on another man than on myself. You will easily find in your diocese a priest more able to fill that high post than I am. I am already pretty high."¹

Mr. Provencher fully realized the necessity of an ecclesiastic with episcopal powers to direct his mission; but he hoped somebody else would be found to shoulder the burden. To be a bishop at Red River meant to stay there for life; but the very thought of

¹Fort Douglas, 15th Aug., 1818.

this was enough to make anyone shudder. Could he be so self-sacrificing as to resign himself to such a fate? Moreover, are not the words bishop and superior intellect practically synonymous? But he was conscious of his deficiencies in that respect. Then he had his likes and dislikes: evidently he could not rule with that degree of impartiality which ensures prompt obedience.

Great, therefore, was his consternation when, after his arrival at Montreal, October 17, 1820, he learned that bulls had been obtained for him, dated February 1st of that same year, which named him titular Bishop of Juliopolis and coadjutor to the Bishop of Quebec for the Northwest. When these were handed him, he would not even read them, but immediately gave them back to Bishop Plessis, begging for time to ponder over the possible consequences of such an appointment, and claiming the liberty of declining the same. Mgr. Plessis thought it best not to press the matter just then, and as the poor missionary stood in need of almost everything,² he temporarily gave him charge of the parish of Yamachiche.

There Provencher meditated at leisure on the awful dilemma that confronted him. He was averse to preventing in any way the progress of the Red River mission, and yet everything in his make-up seemed

²He wrote in this connection: "When I reached Montreal my means were exhausted: I had neither money nor suitable clothes in which to appear in public. I was obliged to borrow a few dollars to buy myself a cassock, boots and a hat. While awaiting these articles, I had to shut myself up, so wretched were those they were intended to replace."

to militate against accepting the proffered dignity. His humility veiled from his mental vision that honesty of purpose, those undoubted ecclesiastical virtues, that burning zeal for the glory of God and the conversion of souls which easily take the place of more brilliant, but less useful, qualities, and in which he was certainly not deficient.

"I have not become a priest in order to amass money," he wrote to his bishop; "if needs be, I shall go to devote my youth to the welfare of Red River, but as a simple priest; speak, I shall obey you. As for the episcopate, it is another thing; never could I persuade myself that I was born for such a high rank. Rome has spoken: I am full of respect for the Chair of Peter; but its voice is merely an echo of your own word. The Holy Father does not know me, and I am sure that if he did he would not admit me."³

Mr. Provencher wrote the same day to a personal friend, who was to be consecrated five days later Bishop of Telmesse and coadjutor of Quebec for Montreal. He begged for a frank opinion on the line of conduct he should follow. "Monseigneur [of Quebec] should know me enough not to think of me," he said. "At all events, I am firmly determined to defend myself as well as I can."

Mgr. Lartigue (his correspondent) advised him to yield. Consequently, Provencher notified his Ordinary of his consent, March 19, 1821. He remained

³Jan. 16th, 1821.

another year at Yamachiche in order to create resources for his poor mission, and seek for recruits among the seminaries and colleges. Only one did he find. He was a cleric, as yet in minor orders, the Rev. Jean Harper, a French Canadian with an English name, who consented to follow him.

On May 12th, Provencher was consecrated by Bishop Plessis, and appointed coadjutor for the Northwest, as the civil authorities still objected to the creation of a regular hierarchy with metropolitans and suffragans in Canada. On the first of June of the same year, 1822, he was off again for his distant mission, with Mr. Harper as a companion. This return trip was in a sense a disappointment to him. At the last moment, the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company advised him that they could not grant him the free passage in their boat on which he had counted. Therefore he had to outfit a canoe at his own expense, and thus were eaten up the savings he had made at Yamachiche and elsewhere.

Many were the children he regenerated in the waters of baptism and the sinners he reconciled with their Maker on his way home. On the 7th of August he reached St. Boniface, where he was received with great demonstrations of joy.

He had been there only one day when he had to give his attention to a matter which for a time threatened to develop into a source of great annoyance to himself and people. We have seen that Pembina was the supply post of the colony, owing to its



BISHOP PROVENCHER,
The Apostle of Central Canada.

proximity to the buffalo, while St. Boniface and its environs had been three times afflicted with a visitation of locusts, which had destroyed all the crops and grass. These circumstances easily accounted for the larger population at the former place.

But it had been discovered that Pembina was just outside of the British possessions in North America, and the executor of Lord Selkirk (who had died at Pau, France, April 8, 1820), had been shocked at the virtual neglect of "the Forks" by the Canadians, in a trip he had just taken there. That gentleman, a Mr. John Halkett, was a brother-in-law to the deceased earl, but he did not in the least share in his sympathy with Catholics. He had just left for Norway House and England after winding up the affairs of the estate in the colony, but not before he had written for Bishop Provencher a letter couched in offensive language, whereby the new prelate was summoned to call on his people to abandon the American post and settle near Fort Douglas.

The reasons he gave for that move were plausible enough, but its execution was not so easy as he imagined. Therefore the bishop firmly declared in a letter he addressed him three days after his return that "this emigration is absolutely impossible this year, because nobody will be in a hurry to come to the Forks with the prospect of certain starvation." He then goes on to state that "far from the Forks being in a position to support the proposed newcomers from Pembina, part of the people at the

Forks will have to go this winter to Pembina in search of something to live on." He added that the earliest that a step such as that contemplated by Mr. Halkett could be taken would be the ensuing spring.

This missive Halkett received at York Factory. On August 30th he wrote to Provencher, almost in the same peremptory tone, and to the prelate's request that he be allowed to establish a settlement on Lake Manitoba, where such of the Canadians and halfbreeds as did not take kindly to farming could get a living by fishing, the inexorable Scotchman answered by a refusal. As an outcome of this correspondence, Bishop Provencher went himself to pass a few days at Pembina (January, 1823), with a view to preparing the people for the measure he was forced to take. He told them that he saw himself in the necessity of recalling Mr. Dumoulin, and invited them to come down to St. Boniface or its neighbourhood.

A few followed his advice; others went up the Assiniboine to what was then called the White Horse Plains, about fifteen miles from the Forks, and founded the settlement which was to become the parish of St. François-Xavier. Others again looked elsewhere for salvation. Thirty-five Canadians, finding themselves abandoned at the bidding of the proprietors of the colony, signed a petition to the American Government, requesting to be taken under the protection of the United States.

This last step occasioned complaints on the part of some Hudson's Bay Company officers, who would fain have held Bishop Provencher responsible therefor, though, as a matter of fact, all his energies had been bent in an opposite direction. The rumours having come to the knowledge of his superior at Quebec, the latter who, by previous communications, knew of Halkett's animus against the Catholic missionaries, feared lest that gentleman might endanger the future of their establishment at Red River.

He therefore asked that if, in spite of the missionaries' irreprehensible conduct, complaints were made in London against them, no opinion be formed before the accused had had an opportunity of clearing themselves of the charges.⁴ Halkett answered that no such complaints had reached London, though the Company's Committee had been advised that the petition to the American authorities must have been drawn and circulated with the concurrence of the Roman Catholic priests. But he added immediately that "this appears to be extremely improbable."⁵

As far as the mission's personnel was concerned, the abandonment of Pembina had an unfortunate

⁴Jan. 19th, 1824.

⁵London, 14th April, 1824. On June 12 of the following year, Provencher, who had just become aware of his delicate situation, wrote to Bishop Plessis: "It is quite true that when Major Long passed at Pembina the people of the place entrusted him with a petition for the American Congress; but it is perfectly false to assert that it was made at our instigation, since none of us was on the spot. There had been no question of it, and we had learnt of it only a long time after the passage of the major. I do not know the wording of that petition, which has been little spoken of here."

result. Rev. Dumoulin, good missionary as he undoubtedly was, had already allowed visions of friends, home and parents gradually to draw his heart from the theatre of his labours. He took his removal from his flock as an excuse for asking leave to return to Lower Canada.

This was but the starting point in a long series of similar withdrawals, the source of unending trials for the head of the mission, because of worry and anxiety concerning the means of recruiting and keeping his clergy. He had scarcely time to rejoice in the arrival of a new worker in the Lord's vineyard, when another who had been under him but a few years would throw longing glances in the direction of the east.

Mr. Dumoulin left on July 16, 1823, after exactly five years of good services. Just one priest remained, Rev. Destroismaisons, and Dumoulin had scarcely been away when the younger priest commenced to think of his own return.⁶

And yet good men in the missionary field were then sadly wanted. Apart from the Indians, for the benefit of whom nothing serious had so far been attempted, the number of Catholics, by outside accessions, natural increase or conversions of Protestants, was getting every day larger. As early as August, 1821, the Catholics in the valley of the Red River were 800, of whom 350 lived at St. Boniface,

⁶ "Mr. Destroismaisons would gladly see Canada again" (Provencher to Plessis, 16th July, 1823).

with forty-six catechumens, and 450 at Pembina, with fifty catechumens. Early in the following year Swiss emigrants arrived, among whom were seven Catholics.⁷ But by the amalgamation of the two companies in 1821 numerous posts, which had been erected merely for the sake of competition, were abandoned, and the services of their Canadian servants dispensed with. These having heard of the mission on the banks of the Red, flocked thither with their families and considerably swelled the ranks of the Catholics.

On the other hand, abjurations of Protestantism, while not common, did at times occur. In August, 1822, the conversion of a Scotch lady is chronicled, and, two years later, Provencher is pleased to announce that of several Swiss women married to Catholics, adding that some more were expected to take place in the near future. Then there were the children of other Swiss who, not understanding English, were sure to fall within the pale of the Catholic Church.⁸

Though he had severed his connection with the Red River mission, Mr. Dumoulin ever kept a warm corner in his heart for it, and he furthered its interests to the best of his abilities. He published in the course of 1824 a statement destined primarily to vindicate the creation of a bishopric there, which many attacked as useless, or at least premature. He

⁷Letter from Mr. Destroismaisons to Bishop Plessis, 30th Aug., 1821.

⁸Provencher to Plessis, 15th July, 1824.

takes occasion of that publication to remark that, when he left Red River, baptism had already been administered to 800 persons, 120 marriages had been celebrated or regularized, and 150 first communions had gladdened the hearts of the missionaries. He adds that there were already more Catholics within that territory than there had been in the district of Boston when that was raised to the rank of a diocese. Dumoulin also extols the virtues of the Bishop of Juliopolis, and ends by soliciting subscriptions to assist him in his good work, heading the list himself with a gift of fifteen pounds.⁹

This and other donations were all the more welcome as the Red River mission stood greatly in need of the sinews of war. One of the main sources of expense was the schools maintained by the bishop and his missionaries. It can truthfully be said that the Catholic clergy concurred in regarding them as works of vital importance. When we consider the extremely unstable character of the population that formed their flocks, we may well wonder at their untiring efforts in this direction, especially as these were so little appreciated by the parents, Canadians or halfbreeds accustomed to a free and easy life on the plains, where the possession of literary accomplishments was of very little use.

Thus in 1821, Mr. Sauvé was asking for more primers, some grammars, *Epitomes*, and other little

⁹*Notice sur les Missions de la Rivière Rouge*; St. Pierre, 10th March, 1824.

school books.¹⁰ A few months later, works on history and books of devotion were wanted.¹¹

Nor is this all. Even at that early date, the thoughts of the missionaries were for the future. They would fain get from their motley congregations recruits to fill up their ranks when they should have to relinquish their labours. With this end in view, they endeavoured to prepare halfbreed or Canadian boys for the priesthood. In 1822 we note that Provencher is solicitous concerning the acquisition of French-Latin and Latin-French dictionaries with a few classical volumes which he needs for his scholars.¹² Later on, June, 1824, he mentions two young men, fairly well endowed as far as intellectual gifts go, who had gone through Mr. Harper's primary school at St. Boniface and were just ready to start on a collegiate course. Even then he had two other boys in the Latin classics, whom he taught himself. They had already gone through the entire *Epitome, De Viris illustribus*, Cornelius Nepos, four books of Quintus Curtius, the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and the Imitation in Latin. "They begin to understand versification," he writes, "and are going to follow belles-lettres this summer."¹³ Then comes the significant ejaculation: "Please God that they do not slip out of my hands!"

His wishes were not to be realized. Neither dur-

¹⁰Letter from Bishop Provencher, Yamachiche, 14th June.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 1st Oct., 1821.

¹²Yamachiche, 18th May, 1822.

¹³June 1st, 1824.

ing his lifetime nor during that of his immediate successor was there ever a halfbreed elevated to the priesthood in the whole Canadian West. But from the standpoint of higher education, these efforts of men with scarcely a sufficiency of the necessities of life to impart to halfbreed children a knowledge which would lift them above the average white man, are certainly worthy of record.

In view of the prosperous condition of the great institution which every Westerner knows to-day as St. Boniface College, it may be of some interest to mention the names of its two first scholars (1823), viz.: Sénécal, a French Canadian, and Chénier, the halfbreed son of a Lachine man settled at Pembina.

Year after year we see the good bishop struggling on with his embryo college, asking for books here, for funds there, and having periodically to admit his disappointments. The scholars were all that could be desired as far as mental abilities were concerned; but, arrived at a certain age, they must be off for the lack of an ecclesiastical vocation. In 1827 he resolves to take boarders if he can get provisions enough. He has already two, with a few more ready to come. A halfbreed named Bruneau¹⁴ should finish his studies within two years, he says; but, taught by experience, the prelate has his doubts concerning his vocation (June 22, 1827). The following year this young man was still with him, in the highest class

¹⁴This was François Bruneau, who became in later years a magistrate in Assiniboia, respected for his well-known integrity and other qualities.

of his collegiate course, and great hopes were built on him which were not destined to be realized.

Another question, which we have already mentioned, claimed the bishop's attention. This was the education of girls. In 1824 Mr. Harper, who was soon to be raised to the priesthood, taught the boys while putting the last touches to his own theological studies. Provencher had his Latin course with his four pupils; but the girls were of necessity neglected. At Pembina he had made the acquaintance of an old trader named Nolin, who had five halfbreed daughters, some of whom had been educated in Canada. One of them, Angélique, he thought would make a good nun, or at least an acceptable schoolmistress. In July, 1824, he wrote Nolin with a view to having his daughter at the head of a school for girls at St. Boniface; but the old man refused on the pretext that, being eighty-two years old, he needed her services. The bishop thought this rather unreasonable, as he had four other grown-up daughters. He suspected that the opposition to her departure was coming more from her sisters than from her father.

The following year he reiterated his instances, but to no purpose; the old gentleman seemed obdurate, though his daughter longed to consecrate herself to God. The bishop had to wait until 1829 to put his plan into execution. Angélique Nolin then came, accompanied by one of her sisters. Without attempting to enter into the religious state, for which she had no real vocation, she opened at St. Boniface the

first school for girls ever organized within what is now Manitoba, as Provencher himself had started the first school for boys within the same territory.

So far the bishop who had practically under him a district almost vast as Europe had but one priest, Mr. Destroismaisons. On the 1st of November, 1824, he raised to the priesthood Rev. John Harper, whom we have seen lending his valued assistance at St. Boniface. Mr. Destroismaisons was a kind gentleman, but endowed with little oratorical ability. With the aid of an interpreter, he occasionally gave short missions to the natives who frequented in the summer the mouth of Pembina River. The results were not brilliant; yet the good priest had the consolation of being listened to and of explaining the principal mysteries of our faith, teaching at the same time a few simple hymns to the natives.

He returned to Canada in the course of 1827, and his place was taken by a cleric named François Boucher who had as yet received only the ecclesiastical tonsure.

Just then, in spite of the veto of Mr. Halkett, a new settlement was being formed on the shores of Lake Manitoba by Canadians and halfbreeds hailing from St. Boniface. After three years (1822-25) free from the plague of locusts, it had pleased Divine Providence to afflict the mission and settlement at "The Forks" with another scourge. This took the shape of an inundation which affected the whole central valley of North America in the spring of

1826.¹⁵ The winter had been very severe and the snow deeper than usual, so that a thaw which came later than in previous years, when the days were longer, raised the waters of the Red River to a prodigious extent. They went up forty feet above any remembered high water mark, overflowing their banks and destroying everything. On the east side of the stream, the bishop's house was the only habitation left standing.

Hence the emigration of many colonists, mostly Swiss, to the United States, while others directed their steps towards Lake Manitoba. Fortunately about 150 persons came down to the Red River in that very year, long after remembered as that of "The Flood." These were old voyageurs with their families from the north, who partially filled the vacant places at St. Boniface.

The Catholic population was therefore becoming more and more homogeneous. Both Macdonells had left the country, regretted by all for their uprightness and thorough attachment to the faith of their fathers. Another English-speaking friend of the priests, Mr. John McDonald, was just threatening to bid farewell to the Middle West. John McDonald, surnamed *Le Borgne* (or One-Eyed) to distinguish him from other gentlemen of the same name in the west, had been a proprietor of the Northwest Com-

¹⁵In April of that year the Missouri rose so rapidly that the inhabitants of fifteen tents of Dakota Indians were drowned, and a French-Canadian, Toussaint Charbonneau, had to take refuge on a floating shed, remaining three days without fire.

pany. On August 16, 1817, we find him at Fort William, and on October 22, 1818, he was indicted, in common with many others, as an accessory after the fact for the murder of Robert Semple, in the trial that took place at Toronto and resulted in the acquittal of the accused.¹⁶ And now, February 2, 1826, Bishop Provencher regrets to record his serious illness on the lower Winnipeg River.

Rev. Destroismaisons had spent the Christmas season of that same year among the new settlers of Lake Manitoba, being the first priest who exercised his ministry in that quarter. As to Pembina, despite Halkett's pronouncement, it counted then more inhabitants than at the time of Mr. Dumoulin.

On Pentecost Day, 1828, Mgr. Provencher confirmed as many as fifty-three persons, a fact that bespeaks a constantly increasing Catholic population. Mr. Harper was then of the greatest help to him, "always on the wing for the good of souls," as the prelate writes.¹⁷ In August of the preceding year, he had left for a sojourn of two months among the buffalo hunters; but he did not do much, owing to the excitement of the chase and the many occupations of the halfbreeds consequent thereon. He passed the following winter at the White Horse Plains (St. François-Xavier), teaching and preaching the word of God, and in June of 1828 he left for York Factory, where he gave a mission.

¹⁶Though not otherwise implicated, John Macdonell, *dit Le Prêtre*, was called to testify in the course of the same.

¹⁷June 18th, 1828.

As to the bishop himself, not only did he attend to the spiritual needs of the adults, but his biographer tells us of the untiring zeal with which he taught catechism to the children every day of his life.¹⁸

Yet these cares, inherent to the pastoral office, did not absorb all his time. Provencher was the father of his people: their material needs and welfare occupied a prominent place in his heart. In a new country, far away from the civilized world, and without any industry or even the more primitive avocation of the husbandman among his Canadians, halfbreeds and Indians, he felt that, if anything must be done to withdraw them from their roving habits and consequent vices, it was incumbent on him personally to do it, and thereby contribute towards the general good of the colony. He therefore taught them agriculture by word and example, going so far as to put his own hand to the plough, even after his elevation to the episcopate. As early as 1822, he had coaxed the Sauteux into sowing wheat in four different localities.¹⁹ He imported from Canada various kinds of fruit trees and experimented with them. Then, conscious of his failures, he tried with their seeds, with similar results.

After this he turned his attention to the question of industries. He was grieved to see the idleness of too many among his people, an idleness which was every way pernicious and destructive of their

¹⁸Geo. Dugas, *Monseigneur Provencher*, p. 137.

¹⁹St. Boniface, 16th August, 1822.

morals. With the intention of giving them some occupation at home, and at the same time to contribute to their material welfare, he caused weaving to be taught to the girls of the St. Boniface school. To this end he cultivated hemp, and asked for cards for combing wool.²⁰

This industrial activity made a healthful impression on the settlement. When a grist-mill was put up at public expense, and then sold out to a private party, one of the stipulations of the contract was that the Catholic mission should be the judge of the quantity of grain that was to be taken as payment for the grinding.²¹

Under those circumstances we cannot be surprised to see Bishop Provencher writing that he had received a letter from the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company in America, Mr. (afterwards Sir) George Simpson, wherein that gentleman states that he "shall be very pleased to inform the Committee in London of the important services which the mission renders in the country."²² Less than a month later, the annual council held at York Factory passed among its resolutions one that mentioned "the great benefit being experienced from the benevolent and indefatigable exertions of the Catholic mission at Red River on the welfare and moral and religious instruction of its numerous followers,

²⁰St. Boniface, 2nd Feb., 1826.

²¹St. Boniface, same date.

²²St. Boniface, 12th June, 1825.

and it being observed with much satisfaction that the influence of the mission under the direction of the Right Reverend Bishop of Juliopolis has been uniformly directed to the best interests of the Settlement and of the country at large.''²³

As a tangible recognition of this usefulness, the Company granted the mission a gratuity of £50 and an assortment of table goods, which the poor prelate received with unfeigned gratitude.

What amazes us after this is the silence the historians of Manitoba have almost uniformly maintained on the influence for good of the Catholic Church in the early days of that country. Alexander Ross, in particular, is so complete and fair that, not only does he ignore it entirely, but he does not as much as mention Bishop Provencher once in the 416 pages of his work!

²³York Factory, 2nd July, 1825.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST INDIAN MISSIONS.

1830-1839.

In 1830 the Red River mission comprised three stations, namely, St. Boniface, Pembina and St. François-Xavier, or White Horse Plains, each of which had a modest little church or chapel.¹ However, the only one which could really pretend to the title of church was the oak building put up by Mgr. Provencher in 1820.² In spite of the fact that this had never been quite finished, and that it had seriously suffered during the flood of 1826, it still served as a cathedral.

But it seemed that the time had come to erect an edifice more worthy of its name. In 1829 Governor Simpson, who held Provencher in high esteem, volunteered to subscribe £100 towards the erection of a stone cathedral.³ Experience was showing that stone buildings were by no means impossible of realization at Red River, since the Bishop of Juliopolis was just then (1829-30) replacing by a house of that

¹A retired clerk also taught school at St. François-Xavier.

²Rev. G. Dugas states in his *Monseigneur Provencher*, p. 121, that this could not be made proof against snow and rain before 1825. We fail to see how this could be the case, considering that Mr. Dumoulin, who left in 1823, expressly says that "Divine Office was [then] solemnly performed in the new church of St. Boniface" (*Notice sur la Rivière Rouge*).

³Provencher to the Bishop of Quebec, 6th June, 1830.

description that which he had so far used as his "palace." The stone was picked up along the shores of the Red, and conveyed to St. Boniface in flat boats.

This offer of the governor made an impression on the good bishop. He resolved to pass into Canada and seek additional funds, as well as recruits for his clergy. He therefore left in August, 1830, and spent over a year soliciting alms in Lower Canada. These were not grudged the apostolic man. In 1832 he returned west, reaching St. Boniface on July 17th; but the lack of stone masons compelled him to postpone the beginning of his enterprise, as the only one then in the colony had already pledged his services to the Hudson's Bay Company.

The foundations of the new temple were laid in June, 1833, and five stone masons at work on the building made such satisfactory progress that, in July of the following year, the bishop complained of his inability to supply them fast enough with stone. The church was 100 feet long by 45 in width, and, when completed, it became the pride of the settlement, being immortalized by the poet Whittier as the edifice with the "turrets twain." It was not finished until 1837, and, in July of that year, some little masonry work remained to be done on the porch.⁴

In giving an account of the progress of that work

"My church is covered with boards and is being covered with shingles. There is still a little masonry work to finish on the doorway. All that which is completest seems solid" (Provencher to Bishop Signay, of Quebec, 4th July, 1837).

Provencher mentions his new stone house as imperceptibly crumbling to ruins and a source of great annoyance on rainy days. As lime was not known at Red River when it was built, the bishop had thought a kind of white clay, common in places along the stream, a good substitute. He now saw his mistake. At the same time he realized that, after the great expenditures consequent on the erection of his cathedral, he could not think of building another house for some time to come.

Funds for these works were not the only results of his journey to Canada. He had brought therefrom a subject who, first of all his priests, was to give his undivided attention to the evangelization of the numerous Indian tribes scattered over Provencher's realm.

The reader has not forgotten that the first point in the instructions given the missionaries to Red River by the great Bishop Plessis was the preaching of the Gospel to the natives, and the compiling of grammars and dictionaries of their languages. But it need not be explained that, with the altogether insufficient number of clergy at his command, all that Provencher could do was to provide for the religious wants of Catholics, Canadian, halfbreed and others. Nevertheless, feeble and intermittent efforts had been made with a view to following, to a small extent, the directions of the Bishop of Quebec.

From a human standpoint, the work had not been pleasant nor the results encouraging. Mr. Dumou-

lin, especially, had not carried home the best of recollections of the Red River Indians. In 1820 one of them fired at him while he was saying his breviary by the Pembina River, the bullet passing through his hat. G. Dugas would have it that the object of the redskin was to ascertain whether the priest was vulnerable or not.⁵ If this was really the case, we must presume that the Indian's first trial did not quite satisfy him on that score, since in the following spring the same individual renewed his experiment (?) with the same result.⁶ But this time some of Dumoulin's parishioners were at hand. They captured the Indian and tied him up. "Many wanted to kill him," writes the missionary; "fortunately he succeeded in effecting his escape."

Apart from the lack of the proper men to undertake it, the conversion of the Red River Indians was an exceedingly thankless task. As Mr. Dumoulin wrote, the chief obstacle "was the wretched custom established in the country of intoxicating the natives when anything was wanted of them. The colony did it with no more scruples than the Company. In the conventions made with the Indians for the purpose of extinguishing their title to the land, one of the chief clauses was that the colony should yearly furnish them with a stipulated amount of rum; so that they had much more than was necessary for them to get drunk."⁷ The missionary then mentions that,

⁵*Monseigneur Provencher*, pp. 314-15.

⁶Dumoulin to Plessis; Pembina, 25th May, 1821.

⁷The same to the same; *ibid.*, 5th January, 1819.

in the autumn of 1818, an Indian woman had been killed in one of the orgies prompted by an abundance of liquor, adding that such outrages were by no means infrequent.

With time matters scarcely improved. It is therefore cause for little wonder if the Rev. Mr. Belcourt seems to have had misgivings when the Bishop of Quebec ordered him to Red River. He was then parish priest of Ste. Martine, in Lower Canada. The dread with which all the Canadian secular priests looked upon the Red River country would in itself suffice to explain the following lines of Belcourt to his Ordinary:

“I frankly confess that I regard with surprise and dread the explicit order you give me to put myself in readiness to proceed to Red River, at a time when all my fears had vanished. What astonishes me is to see how little Your Lordship knows me. The people who have so favourably spoken of me attribute to me qualities I do not possess. I have received from God but very common gifts, and he who will take my place at Ste. Martine might do just as well as I at Red River.”

These were certainly words dictated either by an excess of modesty, or by a desire to ward off the proffered mission. Then comes the heart-breaking of a man in whom the yearnings of nature are not entirely dead:

“I have a father and a mother who are inconsolable, after they have exhausted their means in secur-

ing my education. My father, I know, will not survive my departure. I think that my conscience, at one with the dictates of nature, imperiously tells me that it is not any more allowed to be ungrateful towards one's parents than in the case of strangers who might have rendered one the same services; hence my observations. Your Lordship has procured [ecclesiastical] education to subjects who would not have all these obstacles to overcome, and there are some French who would not be more expatriated in Red River than they are in Canada. . . . I shall again tell Your Lordship that if my representations do not avail; if I am useless or hurtful in this diocese; if Providence designed me to be born here in order that I might have another fatherland, then with trembling I obey.”⁸

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Rev. Mr. Belcourt". The signature is fluid and somewhat stylized.

REV. MR. BELCOURT'S SIGNATURE.

In spite of these protestations of nature, Mr. Belcourt made his sacrifice, little knowing that, in his own particular case, few consolations and endless mortifications of a kind that is not common awaited him in the west. Gold is none the less gold even though accidentally disfigured by dross, and absolute freedom from human imperfections is not to be

*February 9th, 1831.

found in this world. Writing history, not a panegyric, we may as well state at the outset that Bishop Provencher never granted his full sympathies to the new missionary, who, zealous and brilliant, if somewhat fickle and self-willed, would have done more good if in full union of ideals with his immediate superior.

Rev. Georges Antoine Belcourt⁹ is the only Catholic priest whom Alexander Ross deigns to mention by name in his "Red River Settlement." He calls him "a man of active habits, intelligence and enterprise," adding that, "paradoxical as the statement may appear, Mr. Belcourt understood the language of the savages better than the savages understand it themselves. With characteristic ingenuity and perseverance, he so far availed himself of the peculiar character of the Chippeway tongue, as to enrich it with compounds which faithfully and vividly expressed, as far as possible, the foreign ideas of civilization and Christianity. In this respect, Mr. Belcourt has an incalculable advantage over his Protestant rivals, who, generally speaking, rely implicitly on native interpreters of very inadequate qualifications."¹⁰

After having studied the Saulteux, or Chippeway

⁹Born 22nd April, 1803, at Baie-du-Febvre, Lower Canada, Georges Antoine Belcourt was the son of Antoine B. and of Josephe Lemire. He made his studies in the college of Nicolet, and was ordained priest 19th March, 1827. At first parish priest of St. François-du-Lac, he was in 1830 transferred to Ste. Martine.

¹⁰*Op. cit.*, pp. 285, 286.



REV. MR. BELCOURT.

language, Mr. Belcourt established (1833) on the Assiniboine, about thirty miles from its mouth, an Indian village, for which Mr. George Simpson, the Governor-in-Chief of the Hudson's Bay Company in America, granted a very valuable tract of land fully five miles in length.¹¹ Thereon were built in time a church, with houses of humble proportions surrounded by diminutive fields. The whole was the result of his own exertions much more than of his neophytes' efforts. To succeed in his enterprise he spared neither fatigue, manual labour nor expense.

He was still in the experimental stages when his catechumens were dispersed by a band of Gros-Ventre Indians who fell upon them unawares. A house barely twenty feet square had just been put up, which was intended as a chapel for the people and lodging quarters for the missionary. It was at that time the only building of the kind within sixty miles of the episcopal mansion. When assailed by the American Indians,¹² Belcourt was living under a shelter of skins and bark. He hurriedly left his hovel, and took refuge in the log house where he assembled the few remaining Sauteux.

These were times of surprises and massacres. The natives from the south, especially the Sioux, took pleasure in sallying out against the Canadian aborigines, not even sparing the Canadians and the half-breeds whenever they found them at a disadvantage.

¹¹*Ibid., ibid.*

¹²The Gros-Ventres of the French were the Hidatsa, a Sioux tribe.

In the present case, it seems that the strange Indians were merely marauders, or spies bent on reconnoitring for a larger party. It was in September, 1833, and all the male population was away hunting buffalo, with the exception of two pagans, who had not even arrows with them, and two Christians who were to help the missionary in sawing boards for the chapel. From their narrow quarters the two Christians fired off shot after shot, while the others made such a noise that the southern braves thought it prudent to retire.

Yet for several days thereafter they annoyed Belcourt's people, lurking about in threatening attitudes and trying to surprise them, probably for the sake of the scalps which they wished to obtain before they returned to their friends.¹³ This caused a slight change in the location of the embryo settlement. The place which was then chosen was originally called Fournier Prairie, and lay on the left bank of the Assiniboine. It is known to-day as St. Eustache; but Belcourt put it under the patronage of the Apostle of Nations, calling it St. Paul's Mission, or Baie Saint-Paul.

In June, 1835, the missionary reported that about thirty families of Indians had sown, and he exulted in the fact that Bishop Provencher had sent him oxen. Belcourt was generally optimistic; in this particular case he counted many families for whom his own servant had done practically all the work.

¹³Letter from Mr. Belcourt, St. Paul's Mission, 11th July, 1834.

Potatoes, maize and barley alone were the object of these labours.

Not long before, a new recruit had come to the assistance of the Red River missionaries. This was Rev. Charles Edouard Poiré, who was ordained at St. Boniface in 1833 and entrusted with the care of the mission at White Horse Plains. At the expiration of four years he asked to return east, claiming that he had come with the understanding that he should remain only that period of time.¹⁴ Mgr. Provencher had eventually to let him go in 1838.

Belcourt was more persevering, and it is worth noticing that, in spite of the pangs he felt in leaving Canada, he soon experienced, and ever retained, a real attraction for the West. When momentarily absent therefrom, he pined away until he was restored to his distant wilderness. He was a man of plans, always for the good of his flock, but not as often in strict accordance with the dictates of a more experienced mind. We cannot conceal the fact that he generally seems to have considered as essential to the success of his mission that which should have been regarded as a mere accessory. Grace will transform a depraved pagan into a model Christian, but it has nothing to do with racial characteristics. In the search after the kingdom of heaven it is immaterial whether you farm, fish or hunt. To demand that an inveterate nomad should be bound to

¹⁴Provencher to Mgr. of Sidyme, 30th April, 1837.

the soil before becoming a Christian is to go too far and reverse the proper order of things.

With his more mature judgment, Provencher would have preferred more catechizing and less ploughing in his representative on the banks of the Assiniboine. But the latter was sensitive; when remonstrated with, he easily imagined that his good intentions were ignored, and at times the thought of a speedy return east would hover around his mind.

At the very time that he was reporting to the Bishop of Quebec such farming activities by the Assiniboine, he wrote of Mgr. Provencher: "His Lordship has seconded much more than usual my plans for the advancement of my mission.¹⁵ Nevertheless I have occasionally received from him letters which made me eagerly wish to return to Canada. . . . I cannot persuade myself that he has no antipathy for me. . . . If I do not shed my blood for the salvation of infidels, I shall have nevertheless shed many a tear. If it pleased Your Lordship to wipe them off by recalling me, I should kiss your hands with thanksgiving."¹⁶

The following year, while still at St. Paul's, Mr. Belcourt reported little progress and few consolations, though he seemed to foresee better times in the near future. Sauteux, whose habitat was near the Rocky Mountains, had come to enquire into the

¹⁵Under date 30th April, 1837, Bishop Provencher, writing to the Bishop of Quebec, remarks that, up to that date, upwards of £600 had been spent on that mission alone.

¹⁶June 25th, 1835.

truth of what they had heard, namely, that several members of that tribe were “praying” (had become Christians) in a Saulteaux town, which was in process of formation by the waters of the Assiniboine, and that a priest who spoke their own language like themselves was uttering words of an admirable wisdom. They had set out on February 20th, but had not arrived at St. Paul’s before the 2nd of June.¹⁷

That summer (1836), the missionary had the ineffable consolation of admitting for the first time to holy communion five of his neophytes who had been on trial for three years. They were the first-fruits of the Saulteaux nation in the Middle West.

Mr. Belcourt was a popular man among all classes of people, and the influence his popularity gave him he turned to good account. Even when occasionally repairing to St. Boniface or any other centre of civilization, he sometimes did more lasting good than with his own fickle and more or less mercenary Indians. In the beginning of this chapter we have called the reader’s attention to works of a nature hitherto unknown in the Red River Settlement, we mean stone buildings. The Catholic mission was not alone in attempting such structures. In 1832 the Hudson’s Bay Company had commenced near the junction of the two rivers a fort of that material; an enclosure of stout walls 260 feet long, with bastions and loop-holes, which was finished in 1834. Within,

¹⁷Belcourt to the Bishop of Quebec, July 8th, 1836.

there were the usual buildings, stores, warehouses and various dwelling houses for the officers and the servants.

This was the now famous Fort Garry, so named after Nicholas Garry, a prominent member of the Hudson's Bay Company Committee in London, who had come west to organize the new commercial body that resulted from the amalgamation of the Northwest and the Hudson's Bay Companies.

Shortly before Christmas of 1834, a clerk named Thomas Simpson, who was to die miserably after having accomplished important explorations on the north coast of America, was paying off the employees of the Company. Tired of waiting for his dues, one of them known by the name of Antoine Larocque, boldly went into the clerk's office, and, in terms savouring of insolence, demanded what was coming to him. As an answer he received from Simpson, not money, but a blow with an iron poker which split his skull.

With blood streaming out of his head, Larocque dashed out of the house and showed himself to his fellow halfbreeds. After the first moments of stupefaction, these resolved upon exacting an adequate compensation from the perpetrator of the assault. From mouth to mouth the news flew like wildfire that Simpson had attempted to murder one of them.

"He must be delivered into our hands," cried out the halfbreeds. "He shall pay for his crime."

Things looked serious. The poor clerk did not

relish the idea of being sacrificed to the rage of the Métis. As well would it have been to cast him out into a pack of ravenous wolves. His superiors would not any more consent to his venturing out of the fort gates, which had been closed as a measure of precaution.

At about 6 P.M. the crowd of malcontents had increased to an alarming extent. Such was the excitement of the people that even the stone walls of the fort grew to look as a doubtful protection, unless recourse were had to the cannon pointed on them, an extreme measure which could not be thought of. In vain did Mr. Alexander Christie, the local governor, endeavour to reason with the leaders, sending out message after message to offer conditions of peace; the halfbreeds would not listen to any proposition which did not include the surrender of the hapless clerk. The governor himself went out with Messrs. Logan and Ross, in the hope of appeasing the angry crowd. Despite the humiliation it involved, even this step proved fruitless.

In sheer desperation the authorities of the colony bethought themselves of the Catholic mission across the Red.

“We must go over and ask the help of the priest,” suggested someone.

And, acting on this advice, the governor-in-chief himself, George Simpson, with a few other gentlemen, proceeded to St. Boniface, where Mr. Belcourt happened to be.

The missionary addressed the halfbreeds, reminded them of his constant sympathy with them, spoke of the pardon of offences enjoined on all Christians, and, by those kind words based on faith more than on reason, which among Catholics have a hundred-fold value owing to the sacred character of the person that utters them, he succeeded in soothing the wounded feelings of the people. The Company had to grant a pecuniary compensation to the family of his victim, but Thomas Simpson was left unmolested.¹⁸

As Mr. Belcourt was thus exerting himself on behalf of peace among the halfbreeds, a young priest less brilliantly endowed but more pliant and constant in the tasks entrusted to him, was preparing himself for the long missionary career that he was to follow in the west. Rev. Jean-Baptiste Thibault was born at St. Joseph of Lévis, December 14, 1810, and had arrived at St. Boniface in the summer of 1833, where he had received the order of priesthood

¹⁸Mentioning this episode, Rev. G. Dugas states that the governor sent for Belcourt (*L'Ouest Canadien*, p. 68). There can be no doubt that he did himself go out to him. For when, over twelve years later, that missionary found himself at variance with that same gentleman, he wrote of him in a document which saw the light of publicity: "If his heart were as generous as with men in general, he would have remembered that day when *he came*, escorted by the leading men of the country, to seek me in my poor cottage, to quell the trouble of the time, and to facilitate those measures upon which he looked as necessary to the security of his own life" (Letter to A. K. Isbister; Quebec, 21st Dec., 1847. In "Correspondence Relative to the Inhabitants of the Red River Settlement," p. 100). Mr. Belcourt was under a false impression when he imagined that Governor Simpson had forgotten the great service he then rendered him. We shall see that when, after a serious falling out with him, he agreed to secure his return to Red River, he based his intercession precisely on the services he had rendered to the Settlement and himself.

on the 8th of September of the same year. While at the head of the six scholars who then formed St. Boniface College, he was studying the Indian languages, and in July, 1834, he had already made considerable progress in that line. Even at that early date Bishop Provencher saw in him "a subject precious for his missions."¹⁹

It is also at this time that the Bishop of Juliopolis received a petition from the Oregon settlers, begging for missionaries. As he had nobody to send them, he decided to seek help in the east. He therefore journeyed to Lower Canada, and even pushed on as far as Europe, leaving young Mr. Thibault to take his place at the head of his missions (1835-37).

In Canada he secured the services of two choice subjects, the Revs. F. N. Blanchet and M. Demers, both of whom were in course of time to be elevated to the episcopate on the Pacific coast. For the lack of room in the canoes of the Hudson's Bay Company; only one of them could accompany the Bishop of Juliopolis to Red River on his return trip in 1837. This was the gentle and pious Mr. Demers, who laboured over a year in the territory, waiting for his superior, Mr. Blanchet, for whom a passage was obtained from Lachine to St. Boniface in 1838.

With the latter came a young priest from Deschambault, Lower Canada, Rev. J. Arsène Mayrand, who was to remain seven years in the Red River mis-

¹⁹Provencher to Bishop J. Signay, of Quebec, 16th July, 1834.

sion, without being able to accomplish as much as he wished owing to his delicate health.

On the arrival of the newcomers, Bishop Provencher could boast more priests within his territory than he ever possessed before the assumption of the Indian missions by the Oblates. These were Messrs. Belcourt, Poiré, Thibault, Demers, Blanchet and Mayrand. By this list it will be seen that two others, Messrs. Harper and Boucher, had duly walked in the footsteps of all previous missionaries and returned to Canada. The former had left in 1832, the latter one year later. At the departure of the Oregon missionaries Provencher's clergy was reduced to four members, and one of them, Mr. Poiré, was to return east the following year.

When the bishop arrived back from Canada Mr. Belcourt was sent to Rainy Lake, with the object of studying local conditions preparatory to establishing a permanent mission there. He left in the spring of 1838, while Mr. Poiré was replacing him at St. Paul's, where Angélique Nolin taught school since 1834. The ice of the Red River was getting soft, and his horse went through. Fortunately some people who wondered at his pluck, or imprudence, and were expecting an accident, lent him their assistance, and he extricated himself without having suffered any other harm than an icy bath. The missionary remained some time at the fort on the lower Winnipeg River, where he performed several marriages and fulfilled the usual ministerial duties of a Catholic priest.

At Rainy Lake he found the Indians "little disposed to leave the bottle for the word of God," as Provencher remarks in his picturesque language.²⁰ But he did not despair, and we shall see him there again, sowing in ground that was too often of a stony nature.

It is also with this period (1838) that we must connect the foundation by Mr. Belcourt of a mission at the junction of the English and Winnipeg Rivers.²¹ Wabassimong—such was its native name—cost the missionary untold exertions, both physical and mental; but from a religious standpoint it never was a success, though Alexander Ross admits that it was at one time "a considerable establishment."²² It boasted a church under the patronage of Our Lady of Mercy, houses for the Indians and the customary small fields, with cattle supplied from St. Boniface—a repetition of Belcourt's original mistake: attempts at civilizing before establishing solid Christian foundations. For the lack of the latter, the edifice so painfully erected crumbled after less than ten years of labours.

In August of the same year, 1838, Belcourt who, in addition to his missionary and manual labours, had been steadily working on a dictionary and a grammar of the Chippeway, or Sauteux, language,

²⁰To the Bishop of Sidyma; Red River, 6th Aug., 1838.

²¹Strangely enough, in the first of three volumes comprising "The History of the Northwest," Alex. Begg attributes (p. 281) to Rev. Mr. Darveau the foundation of the Wabassimong Mission, though Darveau was not yet a priest at the time Mr. Belcourt established it.

²²"Red River Settlement," p. 288.

and preparing less important Indian works, left for Canada "full of plans for the impression" of the same.²³ In the course of the following year (1839) he published a Chippeway primer, catechism and book of devotion combined, as well as a 146-page pamphlet on the "Principles of the Sauteux Idiom," in French. He had to defer the publication of his dictionary.²⁴

²³Provencher to Mgr. Signay, Bishop of Quebec, 6th Aug., 1838. In St. Boniface and environs there were in 1839 1,600 Catholics, and 700 at St. François-Xavier.

²⁴It remains to this day in manuscript in the archives of the archbishopric of St. Boniface.

CHAPTER X.

THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA.

1839-1843.

For the first score of years of its existence the Red River settlement had been under a one-man's government, as far as the civil administration was concerned. In 1832, owing to the great increase in the ranks of the colonists and halfbreeds, it was thought advisable to have a few headmen (chosen by the Hudson's Bay Company) share to some extent in the responsibility of the management of the public affairs. The settlement then received the name of Assiniboina, and over it was placed a council which met at irregular intervals.

At first the religious denominations established at Red River were not recognized in the formation of that body, whose meetings were held at Fort Garry, as was called the new post which had succeeded Fort Douglas, and was soon to boast imposing stone structures. On May 4, 1832, the members of that council, the first whose deliberations are on record,¹ were George Simpson, Governor of Rupert's Land, president; Donald McKenzie, Governor of Assini-

¹Rev. Geo. Dugas, and most historians of Manitoba, state that this arrangement was first elaborated in 1835, an assertion which is shown to be erroneous by the minutes of that council which are still extant.

boia, and Councillors James Sutherland, John Pritchard and Robert Logan.

The very fact that the highest representative of the Hudson's Bay Company in America was the president of that assembly is good evidence that it was not intended to be popular. Yet there is no denying that most of its decisions tended towards the general good. On the other hand, its numbers were increased as time went on, and, in the last years of its existence, it was fairly representative of the people. It formed a patriarchal government wherein the requirements of morality, justice and good citizenship were not any more forgotten than the claims of the powerful corporation to which it was due.

It was not till the 12th of February, 1835, that, in the second of its sessions of which the minutes are preserved, a member of the Catholic clergy was admitted to the deliberations of that council in the person of Mgr. Provencher. Even then he was there, along with four others, by special invitation, not in virtue of real membership therein, as G. Dugas would have it. At that time the population of the colony amounted to about 5,000.

Even after that date, and before the prelate's departure for Europe, we see the Anglican minister, Rev. David T. Jones, as an *ex officio* member of that body, but no Catholic representative, as such. It was only on June 16, 1837, that is, over five years after the inauguration of the new form of govern-

ment, that Bishop Provencher was sworn in and admitted, along with a Captain Marcus Cary, as an official councillor.

Considering the exceptional position of the prelate in the colony, this might appear a rather tardy recognition of his social standing and administrative abilities. But it is quite possible that, being a man of retiring dispositions, more at home in French than in English, he had so far preferred to keep aloof from the petty politics of the Settlement. That his services continued to be appreciated is shown by the grant of £100, with an allowance of what was still called luxuries at Red River, that is, tea, sugar and a few other table requisites, which was then voted his mission by the committee of the Hudson's Bay Company.²

At all events, his presence in the Council of Assiniboia, as well as that of other Catholic ecclesiastics of whom we shall have much to say later on, proved quite beneficial, and the rôle they played therein was certainly not a secondary one.

It could scarcely have been otherwise, if we consider the vast interests the bishop then possessed in the colony. To mention but the question of education, Provencher was already at the head of a regular school system, comprising school teachers of both sexes, one of whom was teaching English as early as the summer of 1834.³ Fully alive to the

²From 1825 to 1830 the Company yearly granted £50 in aid of his mission. After 1830 this sum was doubled.

³Provencher to Signay, 16th July, 1834.

necessity of bettering the material, as well as the moral, condition of his people, he had also, as already hinted, brought from Canada, in the course of 1838, two women destined to teach the art of weaving to the colonists. The Hudson's Bay Company gave them a salary, which they were to receive annually during the first three years, while the Catholic mission furnished them with board and lodging. An industrial school was opened for the purpose, which in a short time was progressing satisfactorily. But its premises and machinery became the prey of the flames on March 26, 1839.

Yet it needs scarcely be remarked that the best of the bishop's attention had still to be concentrated towards the preservation and propagation of the faith. The former was the *raison d'être* of his more or less permanent stations of St. Boniface, Pembina and St. François-Xavier, while it was a wish to further the extension of the kingdom of God that prompted the Indian missions of St. Paul's, Wabassimong and Rainy Lake under Belcourt and others. The bishop followed with unremitting solicitude the struggles of these pioneers against heavy odds, and he was ever careful to remind his priests of their obligation not to neglect the spiritual welfare of the natives under the pretext that their temporal interests badly needed watching over.

Mr. Belcourt returned from Lower Canada in the course of 1839. In the beginning of July he was again at St. Paul's on the Assiniboine, whence he

conveyed in two lines tidings of the greatest importance for the history of the Indian missions. "Before I left the crew," he writes, "I baptized a Hare Indian whom I had instructed on the way, and who was in danger of death."⁴ The Hares are aborigines of the Arctic Circle. Mr. Belcourt must therefore be credited with having been the first priest to confer baptism on a representative of that great Déné family, of which we shall have so much to say further on.

In 1840 we find the same missionary, ever full of good-will, placing his capacities as a mechanic at the disposal of his bishop, who at times was disposed to look unfavourably on the too frequent display of the same. He turned one hundred and thirty oaken balusters for the sanctuary and side chapels of the cathedral, as well as a hundred and fifty candlesticks for use as adjuncts to Divine worship.

The mention of these occupations, while it contributes towards forming a true picture of ecclesiastical life at Red River seventy years ago, cannot but remind us at the same time of the great artisan commonly known as St. Paul the Apostle who, in spite of the sublime mission he held from Our Lord Himself, did not deem it derogatory to his sacred calling to work with his own hands.⁵

In the autumn of the same year, Belcourt chron-

⁴To the Bishop of Quebec, 7th July, 1839.

⁵Acts xvii. 3; *ibid.*, xx. 34; 1 Cor. iv. 12; 1 Thess. ii. 9; 2 Thess. iii. 8.

icles other events which shift the scene from the banks of the Assiniboine to the great plains of Central North America. He mentions as many as 1,700 carts used that year in the buffalo hunts, of which 200 returned empty. But, worse than all, on August 1st, nineteen persons had been struck, and four instantly killed, by lightning.

Reverting to the Indians, the same missionary fell in with a chief who gave him in a speech one of the reasons that militated against their conversion. As this throws a strong light on the mental make-up of the natives and illustrates one of the obstacles the missionaries had to contend with, we give it in the chief's own words, as they were recorded by Mr. Belcourt.

"I realize," he said, "that thou wishest for our happiness. Thy words are wise, thy mouth is good. The Manitou who made the French has made thy heart. But I told thee last year what I thought. I have since seen our own Manitou; here is what he told me. The Great Spirit is in heaven; it is he that made the whites, with white clay. Our Manitou, he that made us wretched as we are, is within the earth and not in heaven. He made us with black earth, and that is why we are not white like the French. Yes, our Manitou Father is in the earth, and the earth is our mother. The sun is his son and the moon his daughter, while the stars are the numerous children of the sun and moon. I have seen our Manitou; look at him. Here he is as he appeared to

me.’’ Which saying he pointed to a round stone daubed with vermillion.⁶

Such are the coarse artifices to which the Prince of Darkness has recourse to keep the poor Indians from the light of the Gospel.

Rev. Geo. Dugas claims that Mr. Belcourt founded the mission on Rainy Lake in the spring of 1838.⁷ That this is scarcely exact would appear from the fact that, as late as the summer of 1840, an officer of the Hudson’s Bay Company named Allan Macdonell was writing to Bishop Provencher: “I understand that my worthy friend Mr. Belcourt is on the eve of starting on a mission to Lac la Pluie. . . . I feel it a duty incumbent on me to inform Your Lordship that there are already two Wesleyan missionaries established there, sent out from England by permission and under the patronage of the Hudson’s Bay Company.”⁸

Just at that time the great commercial corporation scarcely relished the idea of seeing missions, especially if devoted to Catholic interests, established within its vast dominions. Not very long before Macdonell’s letter of warning its directing body had voted an order of the day whereby it was decided that “neither the Protestant nor the Catholic missionaries would be encouraged or assisted in extend-

⁶St. Paul’s Mission, 9th Nov., 1840.

⁷Monseigneur Provencher, p. 182.

⁸Fort Garry, 29th June, 1840.

ing their labours beyond the limits of the colony without its special consent.”⁹

But Provencher derived his authority from a higher Power. Counting on God alone he founded the mission of Rainy Lake (1840) through the instrumentality of Mr. Belcourt. There the difficulties did not all come from the Indians, depraved and little religious as they were. Lac la Pluie, or Rainy Lake, had been intermittently attended to by Catholic priests, whose first visit dated from 1816.¹⁰ According to Alexander Ross, the Wabassimong mission had just commenced to take root when the Wesleyans from Canada reached Lac la Pluie. The Presbyterian historian thus exposes his opinion on the situation created by their arrival:

“We certainly think, as they [the Catholics] were the first, they had the best right; but, notwithstanding all this, at Lac la Pluie, the Wesleyans commenced their mission in opposition to the Catholics, and here the work of strife began between them, as if the country had not been wide enough for both, without interfering with each other.”¹¹

Then, after recording the zeal and self-sacrifice of the priests and their final failure, he says that “the success of the Wesleyans at Lac la Pluie was not greater than that of their rivals. Mr. Jacobs, one of

⁹March 7th, 1838.

¹⁰A large cross had then been erected by Mr. Tabeau, which was still standing in 1841.

¹¹“The Red River Settlement,” p. 288.

the last Wesleyan missionaries stationed there, was one day conversing with the writer on the subject. ‘We have,’ said he, ‘been labouring there for the last eleven years, according to the usual system, without being able to form a school, or make a single convert.’ Such were the laurels they gained by their interference and opposition.”¹²

But we must not anticipate. When, in June, 1840, Rev. A. Belcourt left for Rainy Lake, he heard on the way that, apart from the antagonism due to the presence of the Protestant ministers, the Indians were much incensed against him because it was reported that a late decision of the Council of Assiniboia against the further supplying of liquor to the natives had been taken at his instigation. It was even freely stated that his life would scarcely be safe there.

On the way he endeavoured to feed with God’s word the numerous bands of aborigines he met, but generally with indifferent success. An excuse for that religious apathy was founded on a story which was then going the rounds of the camp-fires. A Lake Superior Indian had died a short time after having received baptism. When he tried to penetrate into the abode of the Christians in the other world, he was repulsed therefrom, under the plea that the place was not for Indians. But when he made for that assigned to his own compatriots, he was refused admittance because he was baptized. As there was

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 289.

no room for him in the land of the departed, he had come back to life.

Belcourt was equal to the emergency. After having ridiculed the tale of the Indians, as he saw that they were not convinced by his expostulations, he exclaimed:

“Well, then, receive baptism in order to rise again after your death and enjoy a second life.”

It was in the course of that journey that, on the 15th of July, he planted a large cross at Wabassimong (“the White Dog”), as a warning that he was taking possession of the place for a mission. At Rainy Lake he saw few Indians, owing to a famine that had scattered them; but the Canadian employees and their halfbreed children who, for the same reason, had been sent off to shift for themselves as best they could, no sooner heard of his arrival than they returned to the fort and profited by his ministrations.

On his return from that post, he had evidence that even little enlightened Indians could very well distinguish between the shepherd and the hireling. He met a native from a distant land whom he questioned as to the religious conditions of his compatriots.

“Do you pray¹³ over there?”

“Some do.”

“That’s well. Listen to your priest, and become good Indians. By the way, what is the name of that priest?”

¹³That is, are you Christians, do you worship God?

At this question, the stranger and his wife burst into laughter. Then the man said:

"Oh, he is one of those would-be priests that are married. That's why I, for one, do not listen to him."

According to Alexander Ross the missionary station of Baie des Canards, or Duck Bay, on Lake Winnipegosis, was commenced in 1841. But Belcourt tells us himself that he inaugurated it during the first week of October, 1840, in the same manner as he had done at Wabassimong, that is, by the erection of a large cross.¹⁴ In the same trip the indefatigable missionary pushed even as far as Qu'Appelle River, returning in the fall to St. Paul's, which was as yet the only mission with a resident priest. Rev. Mr. Mayrand had filled his place during his absence.

The following year (1841) another priest came up from Canada to Red River. This was Rev. Jean Edouard Darveau, then twenty-seven years old, who had offered his services for the distant mission of the Columbia, but for whom no passage could be arranged with the Hudson's Bay Company caravan to the Far West. This young priest spent six months studying Saulteux under Mr. Belcourt, after which he set out for Duck Bay, on Lake Winnipegosis, while his professor was leaving (May 18, 1842), with men and materials to build a church at Wabassimong.

Arrived at Duck Bay, the young missionary was

¹⁴St. Paul's Mission, 9th Nov., 1840.

pained to see that an Anglican clergyman, the very first who moved a foot on behalf of the Indians since the departure of Mr. West in 1823,¹⁵ was starting in the neighbourhood an opposition station, which contributed not a little to bewilder the natives and make them uncertain as to the line of conduct they should adopt. This was a Rev. Abraham Cowley, a representative of the Church Missionary Society. Darnaveau's first labours, however, were not entirely fruitless. Yet, the differences in creed by which they were confronted sadly puzzled the aborigines. As one of the chiefs once said to the priest: "You tell us there is but one religion that can save us, and that you have got it; Mr. Cowley tells us that he has got it; now which of you white men am I to believe?" After a long pause, as he smoked his pipe and talked with his people, he turned round and said: "I will tell you the resolution I and my people have come to. It is this: when you both agree, and travel the same road, we will travel with you; till then, however, we will adhere to our own religion."¹⁶

This missionary activity involved not only zeal and self-denial, but also considerable expense, especially as, at that early period and with so refractory Indians, it was thought necessary to follow the general custom of the country, and pay for any services rendered. Canoes and crews, or even mere companions, occasioned an outlay which left nothing for

¹⁵"The Red River Settlement," p. 74.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 292.

the poor missionary; and whenever it was a question of building, those who were to have the benefit of the structures that were put up contributed very little, if at all, towards defraying the expenses of the same.

Yet the resources of the bishop were so small that, at times, some were tempted to find him too parsimonious. Alex. Ross has the following in this connection: “This their poverty [of the Catholics] must be admitted to redound much to their honour. Where a new mission is contemplated, and the missionary named, the bishop allows him £10 to fit himself out, then adds his benediction, and the thing is settled.”¹⁷

Alex. Ross was not the only Protestant author to notice the drawbacks under which the Catholic missionaries laboured. “The Catholic priests experienced many difficulties,” writes Alexander Begg, “and, being poor, [they] had not the same opportunity to extend their labours as rapidly as the Protestant missionaries. What they lacked in means, however, they made up by zealous perseverance, and gradually they made their way midst drawbacks and disappointments.”¹⁸

Just then (1841) a reason for even stricter economy would have been derived from the fact that the Bishop of Juliopolis lost £369 in the failure of the Hammersley bank, had it not been for the timely

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 290, 291. “The Protestant mission had also funds at its command, with the aid of which Mr. Cowley could feed and clothe his converts, while the poor priest had nothing to offer them but instruction” (*Ibid.*, p. 291).

¹⁸“History of the Northwest,” vol. I., pp. 281, 282.

generosity of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, which made up for his loss by voting him a grant of 15,880 francs.¹⁹

Funds were indeed needed. His Indian missions were just about entering into a period of development towards the Far West, whose consoling results were to compensate for the disappointments of the Middle West. The important Fort Edmonton, or of the Prairies, as it was still called, had for a commander a Catholic, Mr. John Rowand, who represented to the religious authorities that the minister who had passed the winter with him was making absolutely no headway with the Indians, the majority of whom were Crees, and seemed willing to listen to "True Praying Ones," as they termed the Catholic priests. The gentleman who was thus indirectly inviting the Catholic missionaries to his distant domains was considerably more than a common trading *bourgeois*. He had been in the fur trade since 1800, when he entered the Northwest Company, and, having been promoted to the Hudson's Bay Company grades of chief trader and chief factor, he had been entrusted with the direction of the combined districts of the Saskatchewan and Athabasca. In the Far West he was known as "the Governor." His territory extended as far east as Fort Cumberland, which was also under his superintendence.

¹⁹Provencher to Bishop P. F. Turgeon, Coadjutor of Quebec; St. Boniface, 17th, 18th and 19th June, 1841.



JOHN ROWAND, ESQ.,
H. B. Co. Chief Factor.

The Canadian or halfbreed population immediately under him at Fort Edmonton, including women and children, was about eighty when Father de Smet visited him in the winter of 1845-46. That great travelling missionary describes that post as a most prosperous establishment, and the country it stood in as a land of plenty. The western governor has left the reputation of a man who shone more by his indomitable energy and fearlessness than by his Christian gentleness; but to De Smet Rowand was one who "unites to all the amiable and polite qualities of a perfect gentleman those of a sincere and hospitable friend; his goodness and paternal tenderness render him a true patriarch amidst his charming and numerous family. He is esteemed and venerated by all the surrounding tribes, and though advanced in age, he possesses extraordinary activity."²⁰

²⁰From one of Father De Smet's letters, dated Fort Jasper, April 16, 1846. John Rowand was a native of Dublin, Ireland, where he was born probably between the years 1775 and 1780. He came to Canada in his early youth, and soon entered the service of the Northwest Company. In 1804 he was a clerk at Fort des Prairies, or Edmonton, and, at the time of the fusion of his concern with the Hudson's Bay Company (1821), he became a chief trader in the resulting corporation, being advanced in 1825 to the much coveted rank of chief factor. He was for a long time the superintendent of the immense Saskatchewan District, with headquarters at Edmonton, and he died suddenly (summer of 1854) at Fort Pitt, where his eldest son John commanded. His bones were afterwards taken to Montreal, where they were buried in the Catholic cemetery.

Chief Factor Rowand was a typical trader, a miniature emperor, who possessed the impetuosity of the Irish in an exaggerated degree. He zealously guarded the privileges of his corporation, and, though by no means a big man, he knew how to make himself respected by the whites and feared by the Indians. Playing on the superstitions of the latter, he would awe them into subjection by exhibitions of

A French halfbreed, by the name of Picher, had even come all the way from that distant post in order to beg for a missionary. As none was available at the time, it was agreed that Rev. Mr. Thibault, who knew the Cree dialect, should repair thither in the spring of the following year. This meant a journey of some 2,200 miles across the prairies of the Canadian West.

Pursuant to this arrangement, Thibault left April 20, 1842, and on May 27th he arrived at Fort Carlton, where he passed over a week, instructing, confessing and marrying the employees of the fort, and baptizing their children. On June 19th he reached his destination, after a trip on horseback, or with a Red River cart that was to bring salvation to the door of many a poor soul.

With the conveniences which civilization has placed at the disposal of the modern wayfarer, it is impossible to form a correct idea of the perils and

chemical and other wonders, such as the effervescence of Seidlitz powders or the strange results of other mixtures.

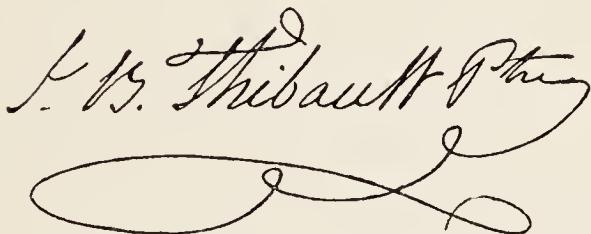
As to the whites, they all knew that he must not be trifled with, and some would occasionally be made to feel the effects of his temper. He was once a member of a large dinner party where most of the guests were of pronounced anti-Catholic propensities. As they were to drink the health of some personage, someone started a song in which the Pope was coarsely derided. This was more than old Rowand could stand.

"I am a Catholic," he cried out in a rage, "and I shall never allow the head of my religion to be insulted in my presence."

And off flew his glass to the head of the singer! This incident caused one of the guests to remark that if Mr. Rowand did not often kneel in a church, he none the less knew how to stand for his Church.

The wife of John H. McTavish, of whom we shall have occasion to speak in connection with the Red River troubles, was the daughter of Chief Factor Rowand. So was that of the Hon. James McKay.

fatigues such a voyage involved. Barring the dangers due to the wild hordes of Indians, constantly clashing with one another and ever ready for robbery and pillage, the missionary had many a time to ford swollen rivers with the water up to his neck, or swim across streams while clinging to the mane of his horse. And then who will adequately picture


 A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Rev. Mr. Thibault's". Below the signature is a decorative flourish consisting of two interlocking loops.

REV. MR. THIBAULT'S SIGNATURE.

to himself the weariness of a six-month ride under the deadly rays of the sun, tempered by no other shelter or shadow than that afforded by one's horse, with improper food, numberless accidents and unmentionable hardships?

Things ran hardly more smoothly when the famous and exceedingly primitive Red River carts replaced horse-riding. "I have broken two axles and am having a third put on," Thibault once wrote,²¹ to illustrate one of the inevitable concomitants of travelling, without a trace of a road, with vehicles in the construction of which not a particle of iron entered.

At Fort Edmonton the missionary was well received. In spite of the misrepresentations and un-

²¹To Rev. J. A. Mayrand, who quotes him in a letter to Provencher, 31st July, 1843.

derhand dealings of the Protestant minister, his mission to the Crees was as successful as it could possibly have been under the circumstances. He even received the visit of a band of Blackfeet, "the most wicked Indians of these regions," he writes.²² Through an interpreter he announced to them the Good Tidings, which were listened to with the greatest respect. Then the braves bade him a solemn adieu in their own fashion, that is, by passing their hands over his head, his shoulders, his breast and his arms. Finally, affectionately pressing his hand in theirs, they departed one after another, but not before they had laid at his feet their good resolutions for the future.

"Thy words are engraved in my heart; I shall follow thy path," said one. "I have not been a very bad man; yet I resolve henceforth to become better," remarked another, who added that he carried the missionary in his heart as a result of his having had compassion on him. A third was weighed down by a less clean past, or possibly was humbler. "I have had a bad heart," he said; "I have been a wicked man. I feel shame in thy presence; have pity on me. I promise to lead a different life now that I have seen and heard thee."

Only words, the reader will perhaps think. Yes, words, but in some cases the forerunners of deeds. On this and similar occasions Thibault was only sowing, and though the evangelical seed did not grow

²²To his father, 8th July, 1842.

into the harvest that might have been expected, it must be remembered that, had it not been for these early impressions and their healthful consequences, the history of the Blackfoot nation might have been written with considerably more blood, after the time for the supreme trial had come for it many years later.

Mr. Thibault returned to the Red River, which he reached October 20, 1842, after having baptized 353 children, blessed twenty marriages and admitted four persons to their first communion. In addition to these consoling results, he brought home a petition to the governor signed by halfbreeds and Indians of the Far West, asking for a permanent Catholic mission in their midst, despite that official's previous decision to the contrary. "All the Métis and Indians he met have abandoned the Methodist ministers to embrace truth," gladly wrote Mgr. Provencher to the Bishop of Quebec.

These were too propitious beginnings to be left unimproved. Therefore the following year saw again Mr. Thibault in the vicinity of the Rocky Mountains. He then had examples of the extremities to which Indians may go when not under the influence of the King of Peace. He was at Fort Pitt when, during the night of August 15, 1843, another party of Blackfeet attacked the Crees camped by the stockade of the fort. As a consequence one of the latter was killed with an arrow, after his horse had been struck by a bullet. On the morrow, a Black-

foot having been found who was seriously wounded, he was instantly riddled with bullets, after which he was scalped. Then his hands, feet, arms and legs were cut off and attached as trophies to the necks of horses, or suspended from long poles, round which dancing was kept day and night. Presently, about sixty Crees left on a campaign of reprisals, and returned after some time with about a hundred horses they had captured from the Blackfeet. They had lost one man and killed a Blackfoot. In another part of the same region, twenty Blackfeet were also slain by Assiniboines from whom they had stolen horses.

Such were the ways of the "noble redskin!"

Mr. Thibault was a naturally timid or bashful man. Dauntless and outspoken with the natives, he did not feel at home with the whites of the Hudson's Bay Company's forts.²³ This led to the early foundation (1842) of Ste. Anne's Mission, some distance west of Edmonton, which for a time he used as a centre whence he went forth to evangelize the surrounding tribes.

While these apostolic excursions were stirring the Far West, Bishop Provencher was faithfully discharging at St. Boniface the more monotonous duties of a parish priest, aided, as a rule, by Mr. Mayrand, who was now also attending to the spiritual wants of the parish of St. François-Xavier.

²³At all events, the self-assertiveness and rather autocratic ways of Chief Factor Rowand were not calculated to make him feel at home at Fort Edmonton.



REV. MR. THIBAULT.

CHAPTER XI.

DEATH OF DARVEAU AND COMING OF THE FIRST NUNS.

1843-1844.

The population of the Red River Settlement was 5,143 in March, 1843. Of these 2,798 were Catholics, and 2,345 Protestants. There were 870 families, of whom 571 were halfbreeds or Indians, 152 French Canadians, 61 Orkneymen, 49 Scotchmen, 22 Englishmen. Switzerland, Wales, Italy, Norway, Denmark and Germany each contributed two heads of families, and Poland and the United States one.

Just then a question of the utmost importance to this motley population was claiming the attention of the leading minds of the colony. Several whites, knowing the insatiable passion of the Indians for strong drink, did not scruple to distil spirits, which they too often used as a means of bringing the natives and others to the accomplishment of their ends. Hence the measure of the council (June 8, 1840), which we have already mentioned. This forbade giving or bartering even beer to the Indians. The following year (June 25th) the same body legislated against the private distillation of spirits.

And yet the evil would not abate. Therefore it was deemed expedient that, in a collective memorial, the Bishops of Quebec, Montreal, Kingston and

Toronto should draw the attention of the London authorities of the Hudson's Bay Company to the pernicious effects which the indiscriminate use of intoxicants had on the Indians, and ask them to take such measures as would seem most efficacious in stopping the unholy traffic. The answer was an evasive promise to do what was possible to further the object of the petition, which, it was thought at London, somewhat exaggerated the evil.

At home, probably at the instance of the religious authorities themselves, a petition dated June 17, 1843, from various halfbreeds headed by one Michel Genton, *alias* Dauphiné, Maximilien Genton, *alias* Dauphiné, and François Bennean (*sic* in the copy of the council's minutes), evidently Bruneau, the quondam college pupil of Provencher, asked that, since no other means could be devised to check the illicit manufacture of spirits then prevailing in Assiniboia, a public distillery be established, with the proper restrictions. This measure was adopted by the council two years later.¹

Meanwhile, as it was evident that, in such a thinly populated territory, only the influence of religion could at all eradicate the evil, Bishop Provencher commissioned his priests never to lose an occasion of preaching against it. Hence we soon see the zealous prelate recording the fact that Mr. Mayrand "has profited by this time of affliction to cry out against drunkenness, to which in spite of this several

¹June 16th, 1845.

were addicted. He has explained temperance and persuaded a good many to adopt it, limiting at first the trial to the next spring.” This was written on April 19, 1844.

Mr. Darveau was no less zealous in the matter. “Mr. Darveau tells me,” writes the prelate, “that he also has preached temperance and that nearly everyone has enrolled his name in its behalf.”² He specially praises that missionary’s exertions. “Mr. Mayrand is always weak,” he remarks, by way of saying that he cannot be expected to do much. But “Mr. Darveau has done good wherever he has penetrated.”

Poor Darveau! The time was near at hand when he could not do any other good than that which should result from the remembrance of his zeal and apostolic virtues!

In the summer of 1844, Mgr. Signay, who, on July 13th of that year, had been named the first titular Archbishop of Quebec, was startled to receive the following from the Bishop of Juliopolis:

“People have come from the end of Lake Winnipeg to tell me that Mr. Darveau has been drowned, as well as the two men he had with him. He had left this place³ during the month of March, so that he might have some time to instruct the Indians of Duck Bay and proceed, on the breaking up of the ice, to Le Pas, a mission he opened last year. I have

²Montreal, Hôtel-Dieu, 19th April, 1844.

³St. Boniface.

learned that he had left Duck Bay in the evening, and had camped a short distance therefrom. It is likely that he perished in setting out on the morrow, as his canoe, his belongings and his body, as well as that of Jean-Baptiste Boyer, a halfbreed from the White Horse Plains, have been found near his camp. It is the Indians who have found everything. They have left the bodies on the beach, taken to Duck Bay (to the house or the chapel) part of the goods, and then gone to apprise of this some halfbreeds who were making salt beyond the chapel. Two men have immediately left to bury the bodies, either on the spot or in the chapel. An Indian who was also with him has not yet been found.⁴

Such was the first account of the melancholy event. Such it remained for a long time among the whites, though soon foul play was suspected among the natives, and little by little, the truth became known to a few. To-day we are in a position to give an authentic account of Rev. Darveau's end.⁵

In the first place, to show how perfectly true was his bishop's remark that he was a man full of zeal and activity, who "little feared those privations to

⁴July 29th, 1844.

⁵And for this we are partially indebted to the Rev. J. C. Camper, O.M.I., a veteran missionary to the Sauteux, who has known several of the Indians connected with the tragedy. He speaks their language as well as themselves, and they could conceal nothing from him. It will be noticed that his narrative fits in exactly with the references to the event and those who unwittingly prepared it, which we glean from "The Rainbow of the North," a book the reverend gentleman has never seen, any more than Darveau's last letter, which we have also unearthed.

which a missionary is often exposed," we may state that, on St. Patrick's Day, 1843, he had left St. Boniface for Duck Bay, on Lake Winnipegosis. Having reached that immense body of water, which was then slumbering under a heavy blanket of ice, he left behind his man with the toboggan and started at a good pace for the house of a Pierre Chartrand, with whom he was acquainted. Soon after a terrible snowstorm broke out, and, in the impossibility of seeing anything, he lost his bearings and roamed aimlessly about, absolutely blinded by the fine snow that was falling to the accompaniment of a furious wind.

When his man reached Chartrand's house, the Canadian learned with stupefaction of what had happened. He immediately set out in search of the too light-hearted priest, wondering whether he would find him dead or alive. And lo! after some time spent in looking for the imprudent wanderer, there was Mr. Darveau, who had been two nights and one day without fire or anything to eat, in the midst of a scorching blizzard. He lost no time in narrating his experiences or dwelling on his sufferings.

"Have you anything to eat? I am hungry," were the words with which he greeted Chartrand. Apparently he did not see anything worth mentioning in his adventure, and in a letter he wrote afterwards on that and the following trip, he does not refer to it except to say that he suffered much during his journey of eighty or ninety leagues.

Arrived at Duck Bay, he spent his time in instructing such Indians as would listen to him, and during the summer he made some missionary excursions along the shores of the lake.

Le Pas, a little below the junction of the Carrot River with the Saskatchewan, had been a trading post of some importance during the French regime. It had also received several times the visit of the Catholic priest since the establishment of the Church in the Red River valley. Mr. Darveau heard that the Anglicans contemplated sending a clergyman there. Full of zeal for the propagation of the true faith, he decided to go and see for himself whether it would not be possible to forestall the minister. A year or two previous, an Indian who went by the name of Henry Budd had established himself at that place, who was acting in the capacity of catechist and schoolmaster combined, under the auspices of the Church of England. In view of what was to happen, we leave it to the reader to judge of the advisability of putting a full-blooded Indian in the place of a missionary among natives such as those of Lake Winnipegosis.

On the way to Le Pas, Darveau having halted at a camp of Indians, one of the two men he had hired and paid for the trip refused to go farther. He even asked for provisions which, after the loss of the money he had already advanced him, the missionary did not feel justified in giving him. Thereupon, the Indian, a Muskegong Cree called Shetakon, mut-

tered words of dissatisfaction; and left. His employer found another man, continued his voyage and arrived at Le Pas, August 28, 1843.

The missionary passed five weeks in the place, a prey to the petty persecutions and threats of those who sided with the Protestant catechist. Even forbearing Darveau, who had found no words to expiate on his physical sufferings, cannot help insisting on the disloyal tactics that were used against him and his people. He writes of his stay at Le Pas:

"Hell has had recourse to all its wiles, at first to drive me away, and then to render useless my efforts. They came to warn me, evidently bent on intimidation, that if I did not depart they were going to drive me away. When they saw that I was determined to stay until they should drag me, hands and feet tied up, from the house I was in,⁶ presents were lavished on the men and their wives, and promises even more so. They would come and

REV. MR. DARVEAU'S SIGNATURE.

snatch away the young people from the catechism to make them go to school. My two servants had also their share of the storm. . . . As soon as an Indian would come up, he was surrounded by Protestants, who did not let him alone before he had con-

⁶He was the guest of an old halfbreed from Michillimakinac, named Constant, who had found him a house.

sented to go to the sermon that was delivered by a native. . . . To render Catholics more odious they gave them the name of *Windigo*, a fantastic being whose name suffices to make children tremble and puts to flight grown-up people.”⁷

The Catholic priest was represented as a dreadful man, who brought death in his wake, and everyone was cautioned to have nothing to do with him or his. “Among my audience,” adds the missionary, “there was an old man who so dreaded *prayer*,⁸ that he did not even dare look at the Catholic Ladder we owe to the zeal of Mr. Blanchet. ‘I fear the magical power of that piece of paper,’ he said.” Whereupon unsuspecting Mr. Darveau wonders “how such a strange error should have penetrated to this distant land.” The reader will perhaps wonder himself at the missionary’s wonder.

Yet his stay at Le Pas was not entirely fruitless. He left on October 7th, promising his catechumens that he would come back to establish a permanent mission in their midst the following spring. Here is the reference of the “Rainbow of the North,” a little book published in 1854 under the auspices of

⁷St. François-Xavier, 7th Dec., 1843. A *windigo* is, in the eyes of the Indians, a person possessed of some evil spirit, a demoniac, a cannibal, or both combined, whom it is customary with them to *slay* at the first opportunity. It is not long since the murder of such a man occurred north of Edmonton. Even the dullest reader will easily guess who it was who, in this particular case, originated such wild stories about a Catholic priest, and who was ultimately responsible for the petty persecution he had to endure. If not prompted by a fanatic, Indians will simply let severely alone a missionary whose ministrations are not to their liking.

⁸That is, the Catholic religion.

the Church Missionary Society, of London, to his passage at Le Pas: "Mr. Budd had been in the summer of 1843 greatly tried by the arrival of a Romish priest who came with the undisguised intention of drawing away the people. He erected a large wooden cross, marked out the sight of his intended house, and after baptizing about twenty of the *heathen* in the neighbourhood⁹ returned to the Red River, intending to come back in the spring to take his permanent abode there."¹⁰

True to his word, Mr. Darveau did leave for Le Pas in the beginning of June, 1844. He had for companions a halfbreed named Jean-Baptiste Boyer, and a Muskegong Indian boy. Not far from Duck Bay, the little party camped for the night. There they were joined by a few Muskegongs, among whom was Shetakon, the missionary's unfaithful servant of the preceding summer. When the Indians had landed, Darveau attempted to hold conversation with them on religious subjects; but Shetakon drew apart another old man named Chimekatis, and represented to him that the priest was the cause of the epidemic which had lately ravaged the tribe. Therefore, he added, we must do away with him before he has brought the Indians of Le Pas to his way of praying and thereby caused their destruction. The missionary's exhortations to embrace the true faith still

⁹An untruth. Though he does not give the number of his baptisms, or the locality of the baptized, Darveau mentions at least five of the latter who belonged to Le Pas.

¹⁰*Op. cit.*, p. 154.

accentuated the ill-will of the old men against him, and sealed his doom.

And lest their crime should be made known to the whites, they found it necessary to kill Boyer first, after which one of the old men shot at the priest. But so nervous was he at the thought of the possible consequences of his act, that he fired wide of the mark.

The guns of both men were thus emptied, and their intended victim might attempt to escape while they would reload them. Hence they urged a third man, called Vizena, the son-in-law of Chimekatis, to kill the priest.

"Shoot him. . . . Dispatch him quick!" cried out Chimekatis.

But Vizena did not feel up to killing a priest. So his father-in-law excitedly insisted:

"Shoot him, I say, or he will kill us himself."¹¹

Reluctantly, Vizena fired the fatal shot, and Mr. Darveau fell by the side of his canoe.

The Muskegong boy being one of their own people, was spared, but strongly cautioned to say nothing of what had happened. Yet, as he occasionally persisted in threatening to expose the murderers, one of them took him out one day to hunt, and he was never seen again.

The bodies were left on the beach, where they remained many a day undiscovered. When found, they were in too advanced a state of decomposition to

¹¹Meaning probably by his black art, his occult powers.

allow of examination. Mr. Darveau's body had been dragged over the sand by a bear, whose tracks were plainly visible, and one of his legs was partially eaten up.

Meanwhile the report was being circulated that the priest and his men had been drowned, though the lake was perfectly calm when they left Duck Bay. Darveau being known as rather fearless, if not imprudent, on the water, the news easily found credence with those who did not know of the whisperings by the camp-fires that told a totally different story. The black deed was consummated. The *windigo* of the Protestant catechist at Le Pas had met with the fate all his fellows must expect among the Indians. At the same time, the Church of St. Boniface had lost one of her most promising sons.

As far as could be ascertained, the tragedy of Lake Winnipegosis must have taken place on June 4, 1844.¹²

Such are, after a careful digest of manuscript documents and other sources of information, the circumstances which attended the death of Rev. Mr. Darveau. Those documents refer to the explicit depositions of Indians directly or indirectly concerned in the drama, whom the veteran Father

¹²We may mention, as an epilogue to the tragedy, that Shetakon himself met with a miserable death, away from home. As to Chimekatis, who had pressed his son-in-law so hard to kill the priest, his end was even worse. Blind and deaf for a long time, he was burnt alive in his shanty. Vizena publicly admitted before his own death that "he was going to burn for two reasons: he had killed his two wives, and had shot Mr. Darveau."

Camper knew personally and to whose declarations he is a living witness. There are a few discrepancies in the details, but one thing is absolutely certain: Darveau's death was due to malice, not the result of an accident. It is likewise highly probable, if not absolutely certain, that hatred for the Catholic faith and a superstitious dread of its ministers inspired by a representative of another denomination were the real cause of the same.

Nothing could properly compensate for so precious a life. However, seventeen days after the untimely end of the northern missionary, an event of a most different nature brought joy to many a heart, especially that of Mgr. Provencher, in the southern part of the Middle West. We have seen that this prelate had scarcely been six months in the Red River Settlement when he manifested the wish to have nuns for his schools, or at least for those frequented by girls. The Misses Nolin had, it is true, rendered him valuable services in that line; but, with fickleness characteristic of their race, they had tired of the work at St. Boniface.

Yet, they were still engaged in it, but at St. François-Xavier, when the bishop received from a Visitation nun of Grasse, in France, a letter wherein the writer, named Angélique Aimée Courmel, offered to start an educational institution for girls at Red River, or on the Columbia. This was in 1838.¹³ Provencher wrote for information and asked for testi-

¹³Provencher; letter dated 6th Aug., 1838.

monials from the nun's bishop, but received nothing. He then applied to the Bishop of Amiens, also in France; but his negotiations with that prelate fell through. In 1842 he begged the Bishop of Quebec to get him sisters of any Order, and then wrote to Mgr. Loras, of Dubuque, in the United States, always in the same strain, but also with a like result.

Seeing that nothing availed, he resolved to pass into Canada by way of the United States. He found nuns at Dubuque, but they could not speak French. In the vicinity of St. Louis, he tried to obtain some of the Sisters of St. Joseph, who had a vast establishment there; but he could not persuade their superiors to undertake a foundation in far-off Red River. At Montreal Mgr. Bourget recommended to him the Grey Nuns as the best qualified for the work he had to give them. After some negotiations, Provencher was delighted to see his offers accepted by the Superior-General of that Order.

The Sisters of Charity, commonly known as Grey Nuns, from the colour of their habit, were founded in 1738 by Madame D'Youville, a sister of La Jemmeraye, Lavérendrye's nephew and lieutenant in his western explorations. It is a tradition current in that Institute that the foundress used to send to the Indians of the then desolate West clothes she had prepared with her own hands, and it would seem as if her daughters had had for a long time some sort of presentiment that they would one day follow their "uncle" into the land of his last sleep.

From Montreal Bishop Provencher passed over to France, inasmuch as, in addition to his own territory east of the Rocky Mountains, he interested himself in the welfare of the still less favoured missions of Oregon. He crossed the ocean accompanied by his very first confrère in the apostolate, the Rev. Mr. Dumoulin, whom, on his return, he would fain have taken back with him to Red River.¹⁴ Though this voyage seemed to have had no immediate results as far as his clergy was concerned, we shall soon see that it was far from having been taken in vain. From a financial standpoint it was a success, the Propagation of the Faith making him a grant of 30,000 francs.

In Canada he found two precious subjects in the persons of Revs. L. F. Richer-Laflèche (better known as Laflèche), who was just terminating his ecclesiastical studies, and Olivier Caron, for whom he seems to have taken a special liking.¹⁵ But when he returned from France to Canada, reaching Montreal March 25, 1844, the latter did not find himself strong enough to go west.

This was a great disappointment for the bishop, who had already obtained from the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company passages in his brigade¹⁶ of

¹⁴Provencher to Mgr. Turgeon, Bishop of Sidymé, 14th Dec., 1843.

¹⁵Rev. Louis François Richer-Laflèche was born 4th Sept., 1818, at Ste. Anne de la Pérade, Lower Canada, and studied at the college of Nicolet. He was ordained priest in that town 7th January, 1844.

¹⁶In the language of the fur-traders, a brigade was any considerable assemblage of boats, canoes, or even pack-horses, loaded with furs or the equipment of the various forts.



REV. MR. LAFLÈCHE.

canoes for two priests, besides himself, and four sisters, at the much reduced price of £175. Fortunately he found an acceptable substitute for Mr. Caron in Rev. Joseph Bourassa, of Lévis,¹⁷ who was admitted to the priesthood April 14, 1844, that is, just in time to leave with his new Ordinary.

The latter was then ailing at the hospital of Montreal. On April 27th, three days after the sisters themselves had departed, not without very excusable misgivings and heart-rendings, Mgr. Provencher embarked for St. Boniface with his two missionaries, the bishop in the governor's own canoe, and the young priests in other craft.

Governor Simpson was proverbially quick in his travels. He could stand no delays, and hardly granted any resting time to his crew. Therefore, at Sault Ste. Marie, Bishop Provencher ordered the two priests to accompany the nuns while he would go on with Sir George. The first ladies who left everything in the east to answer the call of duty in the wild West deserve to see their names go down to posterity. They were Sisters Valade, superior, Lagrave, Coutlée and Lafrance.

The first canoe, with the bishop and the governor, reached St. Boniface on the 31st of May, but the others did not put in an appearance there before June 21, 1844.

The following Sunday the bishop introduced the good sisters to his flock. Their principal work was,

¹⁷Where he was born, 31st May, 1817.

of course, to be the instruction of the young; but he also counted on them for several branches of industry which he thought useful, if not necessary, to a new population like his. At least one of the nuns was likewise to apply herself to the practice of medicine, a knowledge of which she had previously acquired in anticipation of her office on the banks of the Red. All of them spoke English; but, as they did not feel equal to the task of teaching school in that language, they were to put the last touches to their own education with regard to that point.¹⁸

Pending the construction of special quarters for the ladies, the bishop accommodated them in his stone house, which he had vacated on New Year's Day, 1843, to inhabit that which he had built at the gable end of his cathedral, forming an addition to that edifice measuring 46 by 70 feet.

These improvements looked indeed like the dawn of a new era for the missions of Red River. Yet that new era, with the corresponding expansion in mission work and the cessation of all cares concerning the recruiting of the apostolic labourers, was not properly to commence till the following year.

¹⁸Provencher to Turgeon, Coadjutor of Quebec; Montreal, 9th Nov., 1843.

PART III.

Extension to the North.

CHAPTER XII.

ARRIVAL OF THE OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE.

1844-1847.

Over twenty-five years had now rolled by since the Church had permanently established herself on the banks of the Red River, and, in spite of deeds of heroism, privations and sufferings of all kinds patiently endured, very much indeed remained to be done. True, there was a bishop with a decent cathedral at headquarters; but, in spite of two recent accessions to the ranks of his clergy, that bishop did not have more than four priests at his disposal, in 1844, for the 2,800 white and halfbreed Catholics scattered over a region vast as a kingdom. Of these missionaries, one was to return east the following year, and three were devoting their lives exclusively to the salvation of the Indians. Only two had stayed any length of time in the country and one of them¹

¹Mr. Belcourt who, in spite of a prodigious activity and uncommon talents, never had Provencher's sympathies.

would evidently have been preferred away by his ecclesiastical superior.

It cannot be denied that Red River had no charms for the Canadian clergy. In moments of generous self-sacrifice a few had indeed come to labour in that isolated country; but after a sojourn of three or four years, seldom much longer, they had successively slipped out of their bishop's hands. So that it began to be wondered whether the nation which had given so many daring voyageurs and explorers to the West did really possess men endowed with sufficient abnegation to follow those hardy pioneers and save their souls and those of the wild tribes among whom they had cast their lot. Even the great Bishop Plessis had been struck by this momentous question. In answer to a good priest who wanted to go back to Canada after a few years' stay in Red River, he exclaimed: "When one has come to this that he should say: my task is done, it must be because zeal is very dull indeed. Oh! where would now be Canada if the missionaries that came there to plant the faith had not had more constancy? My task is done, did you say. Our task, whoever we may be, will be over only when we shall have spent all our life in devotion to the salvation of souls."²

This inconstancy on the part of Provencher's fellow labourers was all the more galling to the prelate

²Aug. 17th, 1823. Perhaps should we say that they needed the ties created by religious life to devote themselves with some degree of permanency to the duties of a missionary in that wild country.

as, in the diocese next to his own district, that of Dubuque, which had only been a few years in existence, there were already eleven priests, most of whom hailed from France.³

Hence, tired of the endless anxieties and disappointments that had so far attended his endeavours to recruit his clergy from among the secular priests of Canada, Bishop Provencher had thought of securing the coöperation of one of the Orders that flourished in Europe, and he had asked Monseigneur Bourget, of Montreal, to do all he could to get him some Jesuits. In the course of a visit at Rome in 1841, the prelate had an interview with the General of that famous institute. As an outcome of it, the shepherd on the banks of the Red exulted in the thought that he should soon have some of those good fathers with him. His letters bespeak this hope all through 1842, and, at the end of the following year, he had not yet despaired of seeing his dreams realized.⁴

But Providence had other plans. Answering the call of the saintly Bishop of Montreal, the representatives of a much younger religious Order had just settled themselves on the banks of the St. Lawrence. Provencher's attention was called to their wonderful success among the country parishes of Lower Canada. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate, founded in

³Provencher to the Bishop of Quebec; St. Boniface, 30th June, 1842.

⁴Same to P. F. Turgeon, of Sidyme; Montreal, 14th Dec., 1843.

1816 at Aix, in the south of France, by Monseigneur Ch. J. E. de Mazenod, Bishop of Marseilles, were the first missionaries to enter Canada after the cession of that country to England. They had for their object the missions to the poor and lowly, and they were beginning to astonish the eastern provinces by the fervour of their preaching and the extraordinary fruits of conversion that attended their labours.

During his last voyage to Quebec the Bishop of Juliopolis had assisted at the oblation of Father Eusèbe Durocher, one of the first Canadians that were admitted into that Congregation, and this circumstance had naturally drawn his attention to the new body. The Oblates were by profession missionaries to the poor. But it was precisely such missionaries that he wanted; for who was poorer than his own Indians, halfbreeds, or even whites?

The question was just mooted of withdrawing the Red River mission from the jurisdiction of Quebec. This step would make so much the more necessary the services of a religious Order there. If, in spite of the bonds that had so far attached the West to that ancient See, it had been next to impossible to get an adequate supply of priests therefrom, what would it be when those ties should have been severed? Then again, Provencher had counted on the coming of an able priest, Rev. Olivier Caron, who had declined to move at the last moment. The Oblates, therefore, he must have.

It was for his incipient parishes and especially the

promising Indian missions of the far Northwest a question of life or death. "Secular priests," he thought, "will make slow progress; there is no unity in their views, without mentioning the fact that they put their hands to the plough only for a short time, which they always find too long."⁵

Hence he strongly advised the Coadjutor of Quebec, a personal friend of his, to be careful not to thwart vocations to the religious state, because, he remarked, "you will have, returned a hundredfold, what you have given."⁶ And, to be more explicit on the nature of the vocations he meant, he wrote shortly afterwards: "Oh! that I may have some religious, religious, religious! We will do little good and incur heavy expenses as we are at present. There is no unity of views; everyone sees and does his own way. . . . Oh! for Oblates! May God bless their labours and thereby silence those who talk but would not act!"⁷ And, ten days later: "If it be true that some Oblates are to come next year, it will be well for me to know of it this winter. . . . If there are any vocations, facilitate them, for we will do nothing with a secular clergy."⁸

By this last remark it would seem as if, after having been disappointed in the Jesuits, the Bishop of Juliopolis had still his doubts about the coming of

⁵To Rev. C. P. Cazeau; Quebec, 30th June, 1844.

⁶The same to Bishop Signay of Quebec, 26th June, 1844.

⁷The same to the same, 26th June, 1844.

⁸St. Boniface, 6th July, 1844.

the Oblates. Yet he had applied himself to their Superior-General and Founder in the course of his journey to Rome. Saintly De Mazenod, "whose heart was as big as the world," had consented to undertake a foundation at Red River. Humanly speaking this was a most rash resolution. His sons had merely pitched their tents in Lower Canada; how could he think of weakening, if not destroying, the humble beginnings on the banks of the St. Lawrence by attempting in a still much more distant and resourceless land, establishments whose numbers no one could foresee? Could a sufficient personnel be found for both missions in the ranks of the young Institute?

But Monseigneur de Mazenod was a man of immense faith. He yielded to the entreaties of the poor missionary prelate and commissioned Father Guigues, the first Oblate provincial in America (before he became the first Bishop of Ottawa), to send some of his religious to the aid of Provencher. God, who cannot be outdone in generosity, immediately rewarded his servant for his extraordinary trust in His Providence. It is to the establishment of the first Indian missions in Western Canada that must be traced that wonderful development of the then scarcely known Congregation of the Oblates. The thought of the incredible hardships that awaited the missionaries of the Cross in the dreary wastes of North America inflamed the hearts of a multitude of young clerics and mature priests who, leaving

forever the "sweet land of France," thenceforth sallied out yearly to seek out the lost sheep of Israel in the snows of Athabasca and the Mackenzie, without ever uttering a word of regret for the friends and parents they had left in the country of their birth.

Pending these noble flights, we must chronicle the scarcely less meritorious efforts of the pioneers in that hallowed exodus.

According to all previsions, the first Oblates should have reached Red River by the beginning of August, 1845. Yet nobody was coming, and the vigilant watchman over God's people settled there was despairing of seeing them arrive that year when, on August 25th, their canoes were signalled slowly ascending the Red. The good bishop could not possess himself for joy. He immediately went out with Mr. Mayrand and the nuns to receive the missionaries that were to be the saviours of his adopted country. With them were two ladies destined for the nuns' novitiate. But when Provencher looked at the men that were sent him, his first impression partook of the nature of a disappointment. Instead of a band of priests ready for apostolic work, he had before him only one, Rev. Casimir Aubert, accompanied by a young man with a boyish face who seemed scarcely more than an adolescent.

"What!" he exclaimed, "I have asked for men, and they send me a child!"

He soon realized that this "child" was not an

ordinary one, and but a few weeks had elapsed when he asked for many more of his kind.⁹

This wonderful "child" was Brother Alexander Antonin Taché, who was as yet a mere novice in his Order, and a subdeacon in the Church of God. Born at Fraserville, July 23, 1823, of one of the best Canadian families, he was on his mother's side a direct descendant of the discoverer of the country that was to be his for life, the great Lavérendrye. He had studied at the Seminary of Montreal since September 1, 1841, and had lately entered the novitiate of the Oblates at Longueuil,¹⁰ when his superiors had thought that, in spite of his youth and so far uncertain status in his Congregation, he was the right man for the Red River missions.

In contemplating this smooth-faced novice, little did the Bishop of Juliopolis dream that he was resting his eyes on his successor, who was to shed luster on the See of St. Boniface and become the most illustrious man in Western Canada.

The first unfavourable impression over, Provencher wrote to his Quebec friend, the Bishop of Sidyme: "*Deo gratias!* here is at last some seed of religious. It is on this class of men that I have reckoned for a long time, to efficiently promote the Indian missions. Rev. Father Guigues lets me hope for some more next summer. I shall therefore write

⁹"Some more Tachés and Laflèches you may send me without fear."

¹⁰Where he had for master of novices Father Allard, who became a bishop and vicar-apostolic in South Africa.

him. Mr. Thibault wants two; Mr. Laflèche would like to have one also.”¹¹

The Pope had directed Provencher to look for somebody whom he might appoint vicar-general and initiate into the machinery of administration. He regretted his inability to comply immediately. Father Aubert, he thought, was the proper man, but he might be objected to on account of his foreign birth. The older among his other priests had few qualifications for the business of a diocese. “They have planed more than studied,” he writes, adding that he sees nobody but Laflèche who was only twenty-seven years old. Would not some more secular priests come from Lower Canada, even after the advent of the Oblates? He sincerely hoped so. In fact, this, he was sure, was necessary.¹² But events were to prove that in this he was mistaken. For the next seventeen years not one secular priest was to come to the west who did not soon after join the ranks of the Oblates.

Mr. Mayrand left August 29, 1845, and Father Aubert, with his only novice and prospective confrère, became Mr. Belcourt’s pupils in Sauteux at the Bishop’s House. Mr. Laflèche had been ailing and, for that reason, became unable to proceed to Lake Ste. Anne and help evangelize the Indians previously visited by Mr. Thibault, who burnt with the

¹¹St. Boniface, 29th August, 1845.

¹²To the Bishop of Sidyme, 25th April, 1844.

desire to go still further north. Mr. Bourassa took his place in this distant mission.

The young priest then set upon building some sort of a residence for the two missionaries in these distant parts, while his confrère, Mr. Thibault, was travelling among the Indians (1844). In the course of his excursions, the latter penetrated into the country of the Chippewayans, a Déné tribe, which received him with open arms.

He was now dealing with an entirely different race of Indians. The Dénés form in North America an extremely important aboriginal family, of which the most populous divisions are to be found in the United States, where they are known under the names of Navahoes and Apaches respectively. These appellations, however, give rise to an entirely wrong idea of what the Dénés are in northern Canada. Naturally timid and cowardly, though by no means above spasms of childish excitement and anger, they are much more religiously inclined, more apt to imitate superiors, because conscious of their own inferiority, and less immoral than their southern neighbours.

Absolutely nomadic through their endless forests and along the immense lakes of their territory—Athabasca, Great Slave and Great Bear Lakes—they have few large agglomerations. As a consequence, sexual promiscuity is less common with them than among the natives of Algonquin or Sioux parentage. They live on the fruits of the hunt rather

than of the chase, though they also seek out large venison animals, such as moose and reindeer or caribou.

Being of a religious turn of mind, they are, for the lack of an enlightened faith, profoundly superstitious. They place an absolute reliance on the supposed occult powers of their shamans, jugglers and medicine-men combined, whose office it is to drive out of the sick evil spirits that are the cause of all bodily ailments, mishaps and contretemps in nature, such as storms or the lack of the proper winds while sailing, the failure of the yearly salmon run, etc. This the shamans claim to accomplish by vigorous incantations or insufflations in the midst of furious dancing to the accompaniment of drumming and special chants.

The Dénés of northern Canada roam in bands more or less numerous—under the conduct of a headman who is often the oldest father of a family—immediately north of the territory of the Crees, with whom they now intermingle in a few places, as far as the confines of the Eskimos. From east to west they extend practically from Hudson Bay to the Pacific coast.

East of the Rocky Mountains, their principal tribes are the Chippewayans or Montagnais who have Lake Athabasca for their main seat, though many important divisions are south of that sheet of water, notably at Ile à la Crosse and Cold Lake; the Beavers, on Peace River and adjacent lands; the

Slaves, west of Great Slave Lake and on the Mackenzie; the Dog-Ribs, between Great Slave and Great Bear Lakes; the Hares, mostly on the east side of the Lower Mackenzie, as well as the Anderson and Macfarlane Rivers, and the Loucheux, on the west side of the lower Mackenzie and over the whole of Alaska save its coasts. Our sixth part will tell us of the habitat of that important stock south of Alaska.

We now return south, to assist at the ordination of Brother Taché, first as deacon, August 31st, that is, the first Sunday after his arrival at St. Boniface, and then as priest, on October 22, 1845. Bishop Provencher had to use the vast powers conferred on him by the Holy See, as the new priest was scarcely more than twenty-two years, two months and a half old.

On the morrow, the novice pronounced his religious vows in presence of Father Aubert, who represented his General in Marseilles. He was now in spite of his youth a full-fledged Oblate father.

According to the original plans of the bishop, he was to stay near him and attend, in conjunction with Mr. Laflèche and the prelate himself, the parishes or missions of St. Boniface, St. François-Xavier, St. Paul of the Sauteux, Our Lady of Mercy (Wabassimong), St. Norbert of Duck Bay, and St. Mary's of Le Pas, a mission which the Bishop of Juliopolis still considered as extant in spite of the valuable life it had cost.

Hence Provencher still felt the need of apostolic workers for the north of his district. "Endeavour to persuade Father Guigues to send me some more good subjects," he wrote in December, 1845. "Both of the fathers that came this year are persons with whom it will always be easy to pull."

Then a final remark of the prelate brings us to the consideration of the good work one of his oldest priests was accomplishing in the west of his vineyard. "Mr. Thibault has baptized 500 children in his expedition of last summer," he writes. These were mostly Chippewayans of Cold Lake, Lac la Biche and Ile à la Crosse, whither he had penetrated as early as 1844. After having passed a few days at Fort Carlton he proceeded to these different places and was delighted at the reception he met with. "The zeal of these poor Indians to hear the word of God and learn how to serve him is extreme," he wrote. "Day and night they were busy repeating the prayers and instructions. Hence I left them with a knowledge of the Our Father, Hail Mary, the Creed, and the way of reciting the beads. . . . All understand and can explain the chief points of the *Catholic Ladder*.¹³ All those who could make themselves understood in Cree have gone to confession."¹⁴

¹³A sort of chronological history of the world on a long sheet of paper, invented by Mr. (afterwards Archbishop) F. N. Blanchet for the evangelization of his own Indians on the Columbia. We will have a further explanation of it by the end of this chapter and in our last part.

¹⁴To Provencher, Lake Ste. Anne, 23rd December, 1844.

On May 24th, of the following year, Thibault was again at Ile à la Crosse, where he experienced such great consolations that he could not help writing: "It is not possible that any Indian nation should ever be better disposed to embrace our faith than are the Montagnais." Hence he calls for evangelical workers with aptitudes for native languages, as he perceives that the Methodists are already trying to introduce themselves there.

Of course, among simple folk, so child-like in mental make-up as are the Dénés, due allowance must be made for the impressibility of a religious nature, quick to yield to generous impulses, but often too ready to fall back into the routine of a life very different from the Christian ideal. It was no task to convert such people to the truths of our holy religion; the difficulty was to keep them up to our moral standard.

During his apostolic journey of 1845, Mr. Thibault arrived, June 4th, at Methy Portage, the height of land between the Arctic and the Atlantic watersheds, a great rendezvous of the northern and southern canoe brigades of the fur traders. There he met with the same religious enthusiasm. "These good people are inexpressibly docile," he says. "Had God come in person in their midst to make known His will, I believe they would not treat him with more honour or listen more eagerly to His words, though I am nothing but His most unworthy representative."¹⁵

¹⁵July 24th, 1845.

So pleased indeed was the good missionary that, yielding to the general enthusiasm, he would fain "have gone down to the very farthest nations that inhabit the earth."

After the extraordinary fervour of the northern Indians, those of the plains (Crees and Assiniboines) appeared to him less than lukewarm in their love of prayer and practice of Christian virtues, absorbed as they were by their incessant wars and debauched by the firewater of the whites.¹⁶

Returning to Edmonton (January 3, 1846), Mr. Thibault met there the celebrated Father de Smet, S.J., who had been looking for the Blackfeet, the irreconcilable enemies of the Flatheads (of the American territory) to whom he intended to make proposals of peace preparatory to having them accept the yoke of the Gospel. He had been for such a long time roaming over the prairie in the hope of meeting them, that his guide finally abandoned him, thus causing untold miseries to the missionary, who had providentially been led to the Hudson's Bay Company's fort.

Four months later, Thibault chronicled the conversion of thirty-six Indians who had previously embraced Methodism.¹⁷

Meantime his companion of Lake Ste. Anne, Mr. Bourassa, was led by the same zeal for the salvation of souls to take the Glad Tidings to the Beaver

¹⁶May 6th, 1846.

¹⁷December 27th, 1845.

Indians, who likewise treated him as the special envoy of the Deity. In an excursion which carried him as far as Peace River and even Lesser Slave Lake, he administered one hundred and seven baptisms. Later on he met representatives of the Sékanaïs, another Déné tribe, who inhabit, or rather rove over, both sides of the Rocky Mountains. These nomads complained to him that they had been left out of the good things from heaven he was distributing broadcast, and he had to promise them a visit.

Things were running less smoothly in the Red River valley. True, the bishop found cause for earnest congratulation in the good work which the sisters were doing there. In June, 1845, they had already eighty children in their class-rooms.¹⁸ But the venerable prelate, who was now alone for all the parochial work, found his charge becoming rather onerous, owing to a visitation of an epidemic which soon decimated his flock. He was kept very busy visiting the sick and burying the dead. In one day he had as many as nine funerals, and, up to September 3, 1846, one hundred and fifty of his people had died of a kind of contagious diarrhoea at St. Boniface alone, while about as many had succumbed to the same disease at St. François-Xavier, St. Paul, and on the prairie, without counting the ravages from a like cause among the non-Christian Indians.

This unfortunate epidemic breaking out among the

¹⁸Provencher to Signay, 20th June, 1845.

buffalo hunters called for the services of Mr. Belcourt. Father Aubert had left, June 30th, for Winnipeg River and Wabassimong, where he was sorry to find few traces of real Christianity, and Fathers Laflèche and Taché had bidden a long farewell to Bishop Provencher to go and establish a permanent mission at Ile à la Crosse (July 8, 1846).



REV. MR. LAFLECHE'S SIGNATURE.

The Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate had loyally accepted the laborious Indian missions of Provencher. In spite of her own limited personnel, she sent him three more subjects in 1846. The first was a man of great experience and administrative ability, Rev. Father François-Xavier Bermond, who reached St. Boniface on September 5th. Two months later Brother Henri Faraud, a scholastic who had so far received only ecclesiastical tonsure, but was to serve a glorious career in the Far North, arrived (November 9th), with a lay brother, Louis Dubé, the first of that legion of humble co-workers, invaluable aids of the missionaries, who have done so much to make their labours possible. By the end of 1846, hardly fifteen months after the

arrival of the first Oblates, Provencher had therefore the consolation of counting in his territory no less than seven priests, one scholastic who was shortly to be ordained, and one lay brother. Times were evidently changing for the better.¹⁹

In March of the following year, Father Bermond left for the ill-starred post of Duck Bay, on Lake Winnipegosis, which had been visited by Lafleche in 1845, that is, one year after the melancholy death of Mr. Darveau. He passed there two months and a half teaching and catechizing a band of Indians who did not prove too refractory to the call of grace.

About the same time Father Taché was making long and exceedingly tiresome journeys on snow-shoes, first to Green Lake where he baptized a Cree chief, and then to Lake Caribou, an important body of water in the east, which had so far never been visited by the "man of God." Passing by Lake Laronge, he was grieved to see that he had been preceded by a Protestant school teacher acting as a minister.

He reached Lake Caribou, March 25, 1847, and realized how much nearer the kingdom of God the Chippewayans were than the Crees, both nations being represented on that lake. On the following June 13th, he was home again at Ile à la Crosse, and passed the summer studying the native language

¹⁹It may be worth mentioning that Father Taché's was the last trip by the long and exceedingly tedious canoe route. From 1846 on, practically all the missionaries came by way of the American prairies and St. Paul.



FATHER AUBERT,
The First Oblate within the Canadian Northwest.

with Mr. Lafleche, catechizing the Indians and preparing their church, as well as his own garden—the *bourgeois* of the place, old Mr. Roderick McKenzie, had very kindly caused a modest house to be built for his use and that of Mr. Lafleche.

Brother Faraud,²⁰ was ordained May 8th of that year, and his first mission was to Wabassimong, where he accompanied Father Aubert, the superior of the Oblates in the country. On their return to St. Boniface, Provencher abandoned that post.²¹ Numberless tribes were clamouring for the presence of the missionary in the west, and especially in the north. It was judged preferable to send priests where they could do good rather than leaving them where their services were not appreciated.

Father Aubert thenceforth remained at St. Boniface, with the venerable prelate, of whom he had become the confidant, while Father Faraud accompanied the buffalo hunters in their fall excursion.

In the north Father Taché, bent on new conquests, left in August his elder companion. He journeyed as far as Lake Athabasca where, in the course of a mission which lasted three weeks, he baptized one hundred and ninety-four persons, Chippewayans for the most part.

In this connection, the author of the little book already quoted on the death of Mr. Darveau, a book

²⁰During his journey from Montreal, which lasted three months, Brother Faraud was nearly killed by his cart, which capsized and passed over his body with its load. He was then 23 years old.

²¹Letter from Provencher, December, 1847.

which professes a holy horror for the “poisonous pastures of Popery,”²² proclaims the fact that the Romish priests baptized anyone who consented to have the rite performed on his or her person without giving any instruction, “tying a metal cross around their necks and assuring them that they were safe.”²³ He lays the same accusations at the door of Mr. Darveau,²⁴ and again in connection with the two priests at Ile à la Crosse. In the case of the latter he adds that, instead of instructing the candidates for baptism, they gave them a paper containing the names of the patriarchs and apostles, representations of heaven, saints, the flood, Solomon’s temple, etc. Above all, the author notices thereon a road representing the Roman Catholic religion which leads to heaven, and another marked “pretended Reformation” ending in a very different place.²⁵ He further states that “some of the Indians [apparently of Ile à la Crosse] have resisted all the solicitations of the priests,” and that even some who had been baptized threw away their crosses “of their own accord,”²⁶ and begged for Protestant instruction.

The primary object of the book in question was evidently to interest the good people of England and lead them to contribute generously towards the mis-

²² “The Rainbow of the North,” p. 132.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

sion fund. Against this we have nothing to say. But there is even in King James' Bible an injunction from a very high Power against bearing false witness against one's neighbour. We dare say that this injunction was grossly disregarded in that publication.

First of all, it stands to reason that when a missionary passes three weeks in preaching and catechizing—another states that he never had less than one hundred persons at his daily catechisms—his people must have some kind of instruction when he finally baptizes them.²⁷ And yet from the numerous private letters of the missionaries we gather the fact that, even after such a prolonged instruction, only a few adults were admitted, most of the baptisms being of children, while the great majority of their parents were reserved for a subsequent visit.

Then, as to any Indian throwing away “of his own accord” the cross he had received at his baptism, or in any other circumstance, any one who has the least experience of the native mentality will at once stamp such an assertion as a falsehood. An Indian, be he even a heathen, will treasure such an object, and would not part with it on any consideration, least of all will he not throw it away of his own accord.

Finally, one is free to go to Ile à la Crosse and

²⁷“During the entire winter, which is just over, I never had less than a hundred persons at the catechism every day” (Letter from Mr. Thibault; Edmonton, 6th May, 1846).

inspect the prosperous mission the Catholics have had there ever since the days of Laflèche and Taché. He will look in vain for a single Protestant native, and, if he cares to enquire, he will be told that there never was one in or about the place.

Much more generous and truthful is the reference to the labours of the two Ile à la Crosse missionaries by another Protestant, a disinterested witness to the result of their exertions. Sir John Richardson has the following to say in his journal:

“June 25, 1848. The day being Sunday our voyageurs went to mass at the Roman Catholic chapel, distant about a mile from the fort. This mission was established in 1846 under the charge of Monsieur Laflèche, who has been very successful in gaining the confidence of the Indians, and gathering a considerable number into a village round the church. In the course of the day I received a visit from Monsieur La Flèche and his colleague Monsieur Taschè. They are both intelligent and well-informed men, and *devoted to the task of instructing the Indians.*”²⁸ The italics are ours.

²⁸“Arctic Searching Expedition,” vol. I., p. 104. As to Mr. Darveau, he happens to refer in one of his letters to the minister who was probably responsible for the charge recorded in “The Rainbow of the North.” Speaking of an Indian camp he visited on his way to Red River, he says: “I could instruct them only four days for the lack of provisions which forced them to scatter in search of something to eat. Last year they had the visit of a minister who, in eight days, baptized some adults, after a short catechumenate, as you see (St. François-Xavier, 7th December, 1843), which remark hints plainly enough at the fact that his own period of instruction was longer. He does not mention any baptism as a result of his flying visit to that camp.

CHAPTER XIII.

TROUBLES AT HOME, CONSOLATIONS FROM ABROAD.

1847-1850.

While his missionaries were thus winning golden opinions from fair-minded Protestants in far-off fields, Bishop Provencher was not idle at St. Boniface. He was more than ever on the way to become the great citizen of the colony. In June, 1845, he had been appointed chairman of a Committee of Economy, formed within the Council of Assiniboia with a view "to encourage by premiums and otherwise the improvement of manufacturers and such branches of agriculture as might bear" on the same.¹ Exactly two years later, the report of that committee publicly acknowledged the colony's indebtedness to the prelate "for having ordered the model of a carding machine of simple construction from Canada."²

In 1845 he had already five schools with a very fair attendance, besides other less regular institutions, and he intended establishing two more under the good sisters he was lodging in his old episcopal "palace," pending the construction of their house for which the material was ready. He had advanced

¹Minutes of the C. As., 19th June, 1845.

²*Ibid.*, 28th June, 1847.

£50 to the contractor who, however, had used that money to buy tools and provisions while he worked for others. This sum was a dead loss to the poor prelate.

Commenced in 1846, the convent had, two years later, only four rooms inhabitable. However, God blessed the efforts of the sisters, and the best families in the colony, especially the Hudson's Bay Company *bourgeois*, without distinction of creed, soon had their children studying under their roof. When finished, the convent formed a building 100 by 40, two stories high, with a basement three feet above ground.

Side by side with this consoling progress, a storm was gradually gathering on the political horizon, in which Provencher's people were particularly concerned. From a social standpoint, Assiniboia was divided into two very distinct classes: that of the agriculturists, who were mostly English-speaking and generally Protestants, and that of the hunters and trappers, French Canadians almost to a man. The latter were either retired employees of one of the two original fur trading companies or their children, though not a few had also come directly from Lower Canada. Trapping, travelling and chasing buffalo had for them charms much superior to the cultivation of the few acres they had fenced in by their modest homes on the banks of the Red or the Assiniboine.

But since the coalition of the two rival companies

in 1821, the resulting corporation had grown more and more strict in the enforcement of the monopoly it derived from its charter. It had become a criminal offence not only to trade any fur from the Indians, but even to possess one that had not been bought from the Hudson's Bay Company at its own price.

In 1828 a Canadian called Régis Laurence having been accused of storing a few pelts in his house, a force of men was mustered who broke open his door while he was away, and seized all the furs that could be found within. Other parties, both Canadian and English, were dealt with in a like drastic manner.

Two special cases are mentioned in the records of the time which evoked even greater sympathy for the victims, and caused a correspondingly wide dissatisfaction in the colony. They were those of two French Canadians and an Italian. The former had settled on Lake Manitoba after the great inundation of 1826, and were in exceedingly poor circumstances, eking out a miserable existence by fishing. One of the two was lame, and could not have found any other means of supporting himself. The Italian was a tinsmith, and it was well known that he had no goods to exchange for peltries, though, for the lack of money among the Indians, he might once in a while receive a skin in payment of services rendered them.

The Frenchmen had committed no other crime than that of being found in company with the tinker. Yet the parties were apprehended, and their shanties burnt. The poor fishermen were not even allowed to

take their hooks and nets out of the lake, but were immediately marched to Fort Garry, where the French Canadians were confined for some time and then cautioned not to return to their former haunts. As to the Italian, he was kept in prison for some months, and then taken to York Factory, on Hudson Bay.³

It can be easily imagined that such acts of oppression were calculated to raise angry protests on the part of such liberty-loving people as the halfbreeds. To down any possible complaints and awe the free-men and their friends, a troop of five hundred soldiers were kept a short time at Red River. On their return to England, seventy pensioners came in the fall of 1846, who were a year later followed by a like number, making a corps of one hundred and forty or one hundred and fifty veterans under a Major Caldwell.

The Church, as such, took no cognizance of the vexatious measures of the Hudson's Bay Company; but some of her representatives, as individuals, could not help sympathizing with the oppressed, inasmuch as the validity of the charter which was responsible for the persecution was then, and has remained,

³Some time later, in a locality far away from Red River, and where the effects of the colony's petty politics found their way but slowly, Father Lacombe having, one day, had the audacity of presenting himself to the *bourgeois* attired in a coat to the collar of which he had unwittingly sewed strips of muskrat skin, he was greeted with indignant words by the trader, who reproached the missionary with giving bad example to his flock by setting at naught the regulations of the Company. As a result of his onslaught, Father Lacombe had to tear off his coat the obnoxious fur skin.

rather problematical. As early as 1845 Bishop Provencher noted the fact that one hundred and seventy dragoons (or the first body of soldiers) were scouring the plains and warning the hunters that henceforth their expeditions would not be tolerated. This step had for immediate result a petition of the half-breeds to the American Congress, asking for protection in their immemorial rights to hunt, and stating that they were ready to become American citizens and re-establish the Pembina settlement. In this rather precipitate action no member of the clergy had any hand. We shall presently see that the only priest who took any part in the troubles that ensued embodied most loyal sentiments in the document he prepared for the British government.

This was Mr. Belcourt, the idol of the French settlement in Red River. The English-speaking population was slower to move; but in the matter of the monopoly, the excessive import duties and cognate questions, every independent individual thought the yoke of the Company was becoming unbearable. Therefore, early in 1847, two petitions were sent to the Queen asking for redress: one in English, drawn up by an educated native Assiniboian, Mr. A. K. Isbister, and signed by five other Englishmen; the other in French, which had been prepared by Rev. A. Belcourt, and to which nine hundred and ninety-seven signatures were affixed.

The French document begged for a mitigation of the monopoly, a magistracy bench independent of the

Hudson's Bay Company and the right to dispose of the land to prospective settlers, with permission to use for a time part of the revenue thus created in order to improve the means of communication with the outer world.

Mr. Belcourt's factum ended with the following statements: "We are near the boundary line and could settle on the adjoining territory; we are even invited to take that step. But we admire the wisdom of the British constitution and wish to share in its privileges. The sincere desire which our august Sovereign has to render happy every one of her subjects is known here and farther; therefore we expect everything from her clemency."

There is no denying that the petition was couched in most moderate language. It was dated February 17, 1847. In conjunction with its English counterpart, it provoked a long correspondence between the British and Canadian governments, the Hudson's Bay Company authorities in London and America, Mr. Isbister and numberless personages, high and low, armed with memorials and documents of all sorts, for and against the objects of the petition. These various pieces were printed two years later by order of the House of Commons. They form 115 folio pages under the caption: Correspondence Relative to the Complaints of the Inhabitants of the Red River Settlement.

The structure of the mighty Company shook to its very foundations, and, in spite of evident exaggera-

tions by interested parties, many accusations of the most damaging character were well established against it.

The immediate outcome of the agitation as far as the Church was concerned was that Mr. Belcourt had to leave the country. His recall by the Archbishop of Quebec was peremptorily demanded by the governor of the Company, Sir George Simpson, who even insinuated that, in case of non-compliance with his request, he should let the weight of his resentment fall on the entire Catholic clergy of the colony. A temporary withdrawal was deemed imperative, and Belcourt repaired to Quebec.

In this connection, the Hudson's Bay Company added even insult to injury. Mr. Belcourt did not leave Red River before he had been formally summoned to appear before the sheriff in company with Mr. Thibault, under the accusation of having peltries in his possession. Belcourt denied the charge, but the official would not take his word for it. He searched his trunk, where he could find nothing of a compromising nature. Mr. Thibault was likewise exonerated of the accusation.⁴

In spite of Mr. Belcourt's undoubted abilities, especially as a linguist, Bishop Provencher was of the opinion that he should elect to settle in a parish within Lower Canada.⁵ But the missionary who had originally experienced such difficulties in tearing

⁴Provencher to Signay, Archbishop of Quebec, 14th June, 1847.

⁵Letter to Mgr. Turgeon; St. Boniface, 10th June, 1847.

himself away from Ste. Martine was bound to return to the scene of his labours. He wrote twice to Sir George Simpson, then at Lachine,⁶ and on the third of March the governor, considering the services the priest had previously rendered and giving him credit for good intentions in his late interference with the affairs of the colony, magnanimously consented to ask the Archbishop of Quebec to send him back to the Red River.

But it was felt that his usefulness in that field was gone. He was permitted to return as near the settlement as possible, without actually being stationed within its boundaries. In consequence he went to Pembina, to which he soon imparted a degree of prosperity, building a church, founding a convent, and inaugurating other works which it has become unnecessary to detail, as his new post does not fall within the scope of the present work.

Yet active Belcourt had not said his last word. He was bound to be still for some time a factor in the local politics of Assiniboia, and even in the ecclesiastical circles of that country.

To begin with the latter, he had scarcely established himself in his new home, when it became noised abroad that he was to be named Bishop of Pembina. Mgr. Provencher at first treated lightly such a contingency, judging it ridiculous to found an episcopal see in a place he thought almost desert.

⁶11th and 17th February, 1848.

ed and so near St. Boniface.⁷ But a month later he had become used to the thought and believed in the accuracy of the report, as we see from a letter to his faithful correspondent in Quebec.⁸

He had himself been granted jurisdiction distinct from that which he had so far held in virtue of his connection with that ancient See, and appointed Vicar-Apostolic of the Northwest, in the course of 1844. On June 4, 1847, new bulls had further changed his title of vicar-apostolic into that of titular bishop; but these bulls did not reach him before a full year had elapsed.⁹

This appointment revived previous conflicting plans for the future of his immense territory. In

⁷To Bishop Turgeon, 14th June, 1848.

⁸To the same, 18th July, 1848.

⁹The greatest confusion seems to reign in published documents concerning the various steps whereby the Bishop of Juliopolis became Bishop of St. Boniface. Copying each other, for the lack of the official papers which were destroyed by the fire of 1860, the authors generally agree in stating that Mgr. Provencher was appointed vicar-apostolic in 1844 and Bishop of St. Boniface in 1847. Both assertions are erroneous, as we shall presently see. On the other hand, the résumé of the ecclesiastical history of Manitoba down to 1863, which was found in the corner-stone of Mgr. Taché's cathedral, states that "in 1849 the Vicariate-Apostolic of the Northwest was created a diocese"—another error. If we now turn to Bishop Provencher's own letters, we fail to derive therefrom much light on the matter. Writing to the Bishop of Quebec under date 20th June, 1845, he says indeed that he has just received the bulls that make him a Vicar-Apostolic of Red River; but three years later (14th June, 1848) we find him signing a letter, "Bishop of Juliopolis or of St. Boniface." Then he adds in a P.S.: "I have no more any name, and I shall take that of the cathedral. . . . If they are not pleased, I shall change again;" which remark, coupled with his tentative assumption of a title that was not his, seems to suggest that he had not himself very clear notions concerning his real standing in the hierarchy until 1852, when his coadjutor brought him from Rome his new title of Bishop of St. Boniface. There never was a Vicar-Apostolic of Red River.

the course of 1846 the eastern bishops had proposed the organization of a regular ecclesiastical province with a metropolitan within Provencher's domains. Consulted on the subject, the prelate found such a step premature, in the then almost unsettled state of the country, but had manifested the wish to have a coadjutor able to undertake the long journeys which it was beyond his own strength to make. The coadjutor must have rights to immediate succession in the event of the titular bishop's demise.

For this important position he had cast his eyes on Mr. Laflèche, who was then twenty-nine, and would have attained the canonical age for consecration before all arrangements therefor would have been over. As usual in such cases, he quoted Father Aubert's opinion in corroboration of his choice. Unfortunately for the immediate realization of his plans, Mr. Laflèche was then in very poor health. Indeed such was his condition that he could not think of travelling.

True, there was another alternative: Father Taché was a most able man, with a good education, good health and great natural abilities, but then he was so young! He had just been born, Provencher could not help exclaiming in the anguish of his soul.¹⁰

However, the Vicar-Apostolic of the Northwest must have reconsidered his decision as to the inopportuneness of dividing his territory, for in July,

¹⁰Provencher thought Father Aubert was not acceptable for the position, owing to his foreign birth.

1848, we see him writing to the coadjutor of Quebec: "It seems that Mr. Belcourt is to be bishop at Pembina. . . . If Father Taché were older, he would do very well, . . . but we must not think of him at present."¹¹ The venerable prelate then goes on to unfold his own plans. He says that he is writing to Cardinal Fransoni asking that his vicariate-apostolic be divided in three, comprising a northwestern diocese the seat of which would be at Edmonton, presided over by Mr. Thibault. A further division would result in another in the Far North, with Athabasca as headquarters. Pending a fuller organization, he proposed that this should be administered from Edmonton. He ended by saying: "A few years more, and Father Taché will have reached the canonical age. As the Oblates have the charge of these missions, it would perhaps not be bad that the bishop be an Oblate."

As we shall soon see, his original plan of a simple coadjutor without territorial division eventually prevailed. This, however, was not to be realized before Mr. Belcourt had played his last card in the political world of Red River to which we have already alluded.

The petition of 1847 in spite of the enormous commotion it had caused in the fur trading quarters and elsewhere, did not appreciably better the lot of the petitioners. Nay, the dissatisfaction of the French

¹¹To Bishop Turgeon, 18th July, 1848.

population was growing even greater, owing to the objectionable proceedings of the chief magistrate, a Mr. Adam Thom, who was an able man, but passed for yielding to violently anti-French leanings, which he was known to hold from the part he played in the east at the time of the rebellion of 1837 and after.

This creature of the Hudson's Bay Company, which gave him a salary of £700 per year, in addition to board and lodgings, not only would not have any French spoken at his bar, though the majority of the people scarcely knew any English, but he was also regarded as the real instigator of the last vexatious measures adopted by the Company, or the Council of Assiniboia, between which very little difference was seen as a rule.

In March, 1849, a halfbreed named William Sayer, who was regarded as French, though his father was an English *bourgeois* of the Northwest Company,¹² was accused of having illicitly trafficked in furs with the Indians. Hence he was arrested after a vigorous resistance, for which he suffered grievous bodily harm at the hands of the mercenaries of the Hudson's Bay Company; but he was eventually liberated on bail, with the understanding that he should stand trial at the next criminal assizes, together with the other halfbreeds charged with the same offence.

These arrests, following the agitation already described, were the spark that ignited the powder. The

¹²John Sayer, or Sayers, who was trading in the west in 1797-98.

halfbreeds made up their minds that their compatriots should not suffer for deeds they fully approved of. Yet, unwilling to do wrong, they consulted their usual adviser, Mr. Belcourt, now of Pembina. That gentleman, remembering the excesses which the Company had committed on the strength of a charter which many jurists held to be invalid, was of the opinion that if the pensioners were called to arms in order to enforce a decision based on that charter, it should be lawful to repulse force by force.¹³

Now it just happened that the halfbreeds had in their ranks a person well qualified to head them on in such an emergency. This was J. Louis Rielle (or Riel), a man thirty-two years old, born of a French-Chippewyan mother by a French father. Having passed a considerable part of his life in the east, where he had even entered the novitiate of the Oblates, he enjoyed for that reason exceptional consideration with his fellow halfbreeds.

Apprehending trouble, the Hudson's Bay Company had shrewdly fixed the trial of Sayer for May 17th, which in 1849 happened to be Ascension Day, a feast which was known to be of obligation with the Catholics. It was hoped that their religious duties would keep them at St. Boniface while Sayer would be tried.

But they managed to assist in a body at an early mass at the cathedral, and when the time of the trial

¹³Provencher to Turgeon, 27th June, 1849.

arrived, a great crowd of armed men, Canadians and halfbreeds led by Riel, surrounded the Court House. Alex. Ross asserts that 377 guns were seen in their midst,¹⁴ without counting various isolated groups armed with all sorts of missiles. The continuator of Gunn says in this connection that "they conducted themselves in the most orderly manner, merely surrounding the Court House, and by their presence showing their intentions," which were, not to interfere with the trial, but to resist the infliction of any punishment on the would-be culprits.¹⁵

When the accused was called to the bar, twelve halfbreeds escorted him who, at the request of the court, were to help him defend his cause. At the same time Riel boldly stood up and declared that the population demanded the acquittal of the accused.

"We give you one hour to reach a decision," he said, "after which he shall be considered not guilty."

"We object to a judge who cannot understand those he tries," cried out one of the twelve.

"He is at the behest of the Company, who unjustly prevents free trade, and crushes us down with too heavy import duties," added another.

"Yes, and that Company ignores us in the government of the country," complained a third.

¹⁴Bishop Provencher says, "perhaps over 200 men armed with guns." (To Turgeon, 27th June, 1849).

¹⁵"History of Manitoba," p. 304.

"Above all, we must have free trade in furs," corrected Riel.¹⁶

What were the authorities to do in the face of the armed assemblage outside? Sayer confessed that he had traded furs with the Indians, but added that he had received permission to do so from a party connected with the Company. The court was glad to have that excuse for discharging him. They likewise liberated the three other halfbreeds even without the semblance of a trial. Whereupon someone among the twelve, who scarcely understood the nature of the proceedings, imagining that the halfbreeds' demand had been granted, cried out as he made his exit:

"*Le Commerce est libre*" (trade is free)!

"Trade is free; *vive la liberté!*" shouted hundreds of throats. And guns were discharged, hands were shaken and three cheers given in honour of the event.

Thenceforth there was no attempt made at enforcing the odious monopoly. After endeavouring to weather the storm and resist the tide against him by allowing the services of a French interpreter, Thom had to return east, the import duties were lowered from $7\frac{1}{2}$ to 5, and afterwards 4 per cent. In short, all the demands of the French population were acceded to.

¹⁶All these various demands are explicitly mentioned in the minutes of the session of the Assiniboia Council held the week following Sayer's trial.

The following year, Rev. L. Laflèche was sworn in as a member of the council (September 5, 1850), in addition to the bishop and Captain George Marcus Cary, both of whom had been admitted at the same time. On the other hand, on October 16, 1850, the halfbreeds Pascal Breland, Urbain Delorme and Joseph Guibeau were appointed magistrates for the White Horse Plains District, and François Bruneau with Maximilien Genton and three English for the Upper District.

All of which goes to demonstrate the growth of the Catholic element and of its importance in the colony of Assiniboia.

Bishop Provencher personally took no active part in these proceedings. Other cares weighed on his mind. He was now pursued by the idea that, though apparently still robust in spite of his sixty-three years, he could not live much longer. After what he knew of the delays attending the nomination of a successor to some bishops, and the evil that accrued therefrom, he was obsessed by the fear of dying without a coadjutor who could succeed him *ipso facto*, thus obviating the inconvenience of a long interregnum.

We have seen that his first thoughts had been for Mr. Laflèche. He had even called him to St. Boniface to be in a position to judge for himself of his health, and the gentleman had arrived from Ile à la Crosse shortly after the troubles just recited. He was lame from rheumatic pains and sores in the legs,

and he would not hear of the episcopate. The mission of St. François-Xavier not occasioning much travelling on the part of its incumbent, Laflèche was appointed thereto.

At St. Boniface, two young Oblates, Fathers Maisonneuve and Tissot,¹⁷ had arrived from France the preceding year (1848), and were awaiting marching orders for Ile à la Crosse, where Father Taché was doing wonders, with the help of Father Faraud. As to Father Aubert, he was recalled to Canada in the course of 1850, so that the venerable prelate felt all the more the need of someone to share the burden that was now pressing so heavily upon his shoulders.

He despaired of Mr. Laflèche. After him he had no choice: in spite of his youth, Father Taché was evidently the man for the situation. He knew the country and several languages, was able and learned, and above all he belonged to a religious Order. Once consecrated, that Order could not possibly abandon the missions over which he would preside. "This diocese must fall into the hands of the Oblates, it could not otherwise get recruits for its clergy," he wrote to Mgr. Turgeon.¹⁸

Consequently, he submitted his name to Rome, after having asked for the consent of his Superior-General,¹⁹ Mgr. de Mazenod.

¹⁷The latter only a scholastic brother when he arrived at St. Boniface.

¹⁸August 28th, 1849.

¹⁹St. Boniface, 29th Nov., 1849.

Here we cannot help admiring the designs of Providence, and the means it takes to put them into execution. The revolution of 1848 had left its traces over almost all continental Europe, but most especially in France, which, then as now, alone contributed more towards the support of foreign missions than all the other Catholic nations together. Owing to the last named events and the unsettled state of that country, it was feared that the source of French generosity must be dried up. Hence the necessity, not only of retrenchment, but also of keeping only such missions as could not possibly be abandoned.

The case of the Red River establishments and their dependencies in the north was even more hopeless. It had been represented to Mgr. de Mazenod that it was a country without a future and that it could not furnish his Oblates with work or resources. It is therefore more than likely that, had Mgr. Provencher's letter concerning the elevation of Father Taché reached the Superior-General before Rome had settled the matter, he would have refused his consent to a step which was tantamount to assuming for ever the burden of those missions.

But, for unknown reasons, that letter was kept in Montreal along with others, and it reached Marseilles only after the emission of Taché's bulls (June 24, 1850). Aged only twenty-seven, the reverend gentleman was named by the Pope Bishop of Arath *in partibus infidelium* and coadjutor to

Bishop Provencher, with right to succeed him on his demise.

Mgr. de Mazenod, in the first moment of surprise caused by the absence of the proper explanations from the Vicar-Apostolic of the Northwest, was inclined to look on the appointment in the light of a bad trick played on him. But he soon recognized the finger of God in this nomination which came in direct opposition to his own plans for the Indian missions of North America. He therefore ordered Father Taché to cross the ocean preparatory to being consecrated in France by his own father in God.

CHAPTER XIV.

DEATH OF BISHOP PROVENCHER.

1850-1853.

While these arrangements were being made for the good of the missions, the party who was the most directly concerned in their realization was continuing his apostolic labours some fifteen hundred miles north of St. Boniface without in the least dreaming of the high destinies that were being prepared for him. In 1849 the courier had brought him and his socius Father Faraud the news of the revolution in France, which, it was said, had considerably reduced the receipts of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. In consequence the superior of the two missionaries, Father Aubert, hinted that their post would probably have to be abandoned in the near future.

On hearing of this they immediately drew up and sent him the following letter, which deserves to be quoted in its entirety.

"The news contained in your communication grieves us, but we are not discouraged by it. We know that you have at heart the good of our missions, and we cannot bear the thought of abandoning our dear neophytes and our numerous catechumens. We hope that it will always be possible to

get altar bread and wine for the Holy Sacrifice. Apart from this source of consolation and strength, we ask of you only one thing: permission to go on with our missions. The fish of the lake will suffice for our subsistence and the spoils of the wild beasts for our clothing. For mercy's sake, do not recall us."

These lines speak for themselves; we would only lessen their significance by commenting on them. We must, however, remark that the prayers of the devoted missionaries were heard. They continued their good work, aided, since July, 1849, by Brother Dubé, who attended to the material concerns of the establishment of Ile à la Crosse.

It is to that same year that we must trace the founding (September 8th) of the mission of Athabasca as a permanent post. Father Faraud was its first incumbent. We have also to count among the happy events of that year the passage at Red River of a priest who was soon after to give his name to the Congregation of the Oblates. Writing to Bishop Turgeon under date November 30, 1849, Provencher has the following: "Mr. Lacombe has considerably pleased us." This must suffice for the present. That name will occur more than once in the following pages.

In the spring of 1850, Fathers Maisonneuve and Tissot replaced Father Faraud at Ile à la Crosse, and set upon learning the language with the help of Father Taché, who, since the departure of Mr.

Laflèche, had become the superior of the establishment.

On Lake Manitoba, Father Bermond was endeavouring with little enough success, to break the Saulteux for the yoke of the Gospel. His aim was to bring the late Mr. Darveau's Indians to settle about that sheet of water, instead of Lake Winnipegosis, owing to the greater facility for the missionary to attend them. But the old animus instilled in their minds was persisting, and it is said that, on one occasion, Father Bermond's life was even in danger with them.

From Ile à la Crosse Father Taché had been visiting various camps of Déné Indians and Crees in widely separated localities, when he was thunderstruck at receiving, in February, 1851, the news of his elevation to the episcopate. His bishop ordered him to St. Boniface, and his own religious superior gave him a similar command. The young priest had nothing to do but obey the summons. Arrived at St. Boniface he found a letter from Mgr. de Mazenod, who ordered him in the name of holy obedience to leave immediately for Marseilles. The Founder of the Oblates wanted to see that youthful son of his who seemed to enjoy universal esteem.

Once at the feet of the stately prelate, the young missionary thought he might still ward off the redoubtable burden proffered him. But De Mazenod had a will of his own.

"You shall be a bishop," he declared.



by Jean Malvaux

RT. REV. CHARLES J. E. DE MAZENOD,
Bishop of Marseilles,
Founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

"But, my Lord, my age, my shortcomings, such and such a reason."

"The Holy Father has appointed you, and when the Pope speaks, it is God that speaks."

"Yet, my Lord, I want to remain an Oblate."

"It is quite so that I understand it."

"But episcopal dignity seems incompatible with religious life."

"What! the fullness of the priesthood excludes that perfection to which a religious must aspire!"

Then drawing himself up with the noble dignity which characterized him, De Mazenod added:

"Nobody is more a bishop than I am, and surely nobody is more of an Oblate either."

Taché was consecrated November 23, 1851, at Viviers, in the southeast of France. Then he was named Vicar of the Oblate Missions in Northwestern America.¹ He soon after repaired to Rome, where he obtained that the meaningless title of Vicar-Apostolic of the Northwest be changed into that of Bishop of St. Boniface.

In his zeal for the propagation of the Catholic faith the titulary of that new See had asked from a very different power—the Hudson's Bay Company's authorities—permission to establish a permanent mission at York Factory for the benefit of the employees of his communion and the Indians

¹A Vicar of Missions, in the Oblate Order, is a superior of several missionary posts, the same as a Provincial for a regularly constituted Province, where the houses have generally more subjects and are more fully organized.

who might feel like seeking admission therein. And as he knew of the hostility of some high personages to such a step, Provencher had deemed it advisable to keep in the background, and let the Coadjutor of Quebec, and the Bishops of Montreal, Martyropolis and Bytown (Ottawa) transmit themselves his request.

Nevertheless that permission was refused on the pretext that "the collision of hostile creeds, which could not fail to result from the adoption of such a measure, would be injurious both to the spiritual and temporal interests of the natives."²

Nothing daunted by this rebuke, the same prelates made a new attempt in January of the following year. They regretted the hostility to their denomination which such a refusal implied; they grieved at the reasons on which it was based, considering that their missionaries had ever acted for the best interests of the people without distinction of creed, instead of causing collisions that would militate against their usefulness.

They ended their memorial thus: "It is useless to remind your Committee of the powerful motives which your honourable Company has to use its charter with such moderation that it may not result in complaints against the immense privileges which it enjoys."

This indirect thrust at the much debated charter was too much for the fur magnates. Their second

²A. Barclay, Secretary Hudson's Bay Company, London, 24th Aug., 1850.

reply was even more discouraging than the first. They wrote to the bishops:

"The Committee are persuaded that if you reconsider the words alluded to, you will see that it is the hostility of creeds, not of the professors of those creeds, from which they are anxious to protect the natives of their territories. For this and other reasons, preparations have been made, by the endowment of the bishopric of Rupert's Land, for a greater extension throughout the country of the missionary system adopted by the Church of England, to which it is their intention to give all the support in their power. Nor have they any fear that they will either suffer in public opinion or endanger their charter by preferring Protestant to Roman Catholic missionaries as instructors for the native population."³

After such an open admission of partiality, nothing was left to be hoped for by the Catholic hierarchy from that quarter and the matter had to be dropped.

Unable to do anything for the Catholics of York Factory, Provencher turned his attention to a nearer post. In the course of 1850, the halfbreeds of St. François-Xavier received two Grey nuns, Sisters Lagrave and Lafrance, who immediately established a school for the children of the locality.

The home authorities of the Company and even Protestant clergymen in Red River, who were in a

³A. Barclay, London, 14th Feb., 1851, to the same.

better position to appreciate the services of the Catholic priests, were more accommodating. On May 1, 1851, Rev. Mr. William Cochrane⁴ moved, and Mr. Lafleche seconded, in the colonial council, "that £100 be granted from the public funds to be divided annually between the Bishop of Rupert's Land and the Bishop of the Northwest, to be applied by them at their discretion for the purposes of education." That motion was carried unanimously.

In the following year, Mr. Lafleche seconded a proposal by Dr. Bunn of the same council, to the effect that fifteen pounds should be granted for educational purposes to Reverend John Black, the new Presbyterian minister in the settlement. This motion likewise met with unanimous approval.⁵

And yet, in common with the preceding, it was disallowed by the London Committee "as being a misapplication of the public fund"!⁶ Bigotry and narrow-mindedness do not date from yesterday. The repartition of some of the monies contributed by the public with a view to helping its schools a misapplication of the public fund! And this at a time when all the schools in the colony were under the auspices of some church and Provencher's teachers had just opened classes for English-speaking pupils!⁷ Yet there are some who will continue to

⁴Whose name is often spelt Cockran in contemporaneous literature. Mr. (afterwards Archdeacon) Cochrane was, according to Dr. Bryce ("History of the Hudson's Bay Company," p. 299), "a man of gigantic form and of amazing bonhomie."

⁵Minutes of the Council, 13th July, 1852.

⁶Ibid., 25th March, 1853.

⁷Provencher to Archbishop of Quebec, 21st July, 1851.

proclaim that it is the Catholic Church which is opposed to instruction!

But others than the Bishop of St. Boniface had their troubles. We have seen Mr. Laflèche stationed at St. François-Xavier. Notwithstanding the unsatisfactory state of his health, he accompanied his halfbreed flock over the prairies in quest of buffalo. The Sioux were growing more and more hostile, and disliked the halfbreeds on account of the Sauteux or Cree blood that flowed in their veins. Yet, as a result of their Christian training, the latter more than once did them a good turn. It might be well for us to accompany Mr. Laflèche in one or two of these expeditions. We will find here cause for being thankful to the civilizing effects of religion in the same proportion as we are shocked at the atrocities we will see perpetrated by those who would not hear of it. This little excursion to the southwest of Red River will initiate us into the dangers inherent to the priestly office on the plains.

Mr. Laflèche's first experience there took place in 1849. One day two Sioux tumbled unawares into his camp, which contained several Sauteux Indians. As soon as they were identified, the missionary and his halfbreeds had to cover them with their own bodies to protect them against the Sauteux bullets and arrows. Six full miles had they to escort them before their traditional enemies desisted from their endeavours to do away with them.

Some time later (on August 4, 1849), over one

hundred Sauteux left for the Fort des Prairies, who on the morrow suddenly found themselves face to face with seven Indians who seemed to be Sioux. It was useless to think of flight; the latter therefore put up a bold front and advanced to greet the Sauteux as if they were friends.

"Sioux! Sioux! Let us kill them!" exclaimed some Sauteux.

To prevent a possible mistake their chief questions the strangers in his own dialect, to which the strayed Sioux cannot answer without betraying their identity. Pressed for a reply, one of them hazards a few words in Sauteux which, by his foreign accent, lead to the immediate destruction of himself and friends. Five of the Sioux are riddled with bullets, two attempt to flee, one of whom falls dead a short distance away, while the other rends the air with his shrieks as he is slashed and carved alive with the Sauteux daggers. He is immediately scalped while still full of life, his limbs cut off one after the other, and everyone eagerly seeks for possession of some part of his body to take home as a trophy.

But a more stirring experience was in store for Mr. Laflèche and his people. In the evening of July 7, 1850, his party was reaching a place called Grand Coteau, where they intended to camp for the morrow, which was a Sunday, when the scout signalled the presence of a very large Indian camp some distance off. The halfbreeds were only about eighty,

some of whom had not seen more than twelve or fifteen summers. To ascertain the nationality of the strangers, five scouts imprudently advanced too near, and three of them were captured while the others galloped back to their own friends.

"The Sioux," they cried, "an immense number of Sioux!"

It was afterwards ascertained that there must have been almost two thousand warriors in the horde as the number of their lodges was fully six hundred.

Therefore the anxiety of the little halfbreed party may well be imagined. Immediate preparations are made for a struggle. A stockade is formed with the carts, under which holes are dug for the women and children to hide in, and without the resulting circle breastworks are hurriedly thrown up to protect the besieged.

In spite of this, the enemy numbering at least twenty to one, there was, humanly speaking, no chance of salvation for the halfbreeds should a resolute assault be made by the Sioux. On the morrow these are seen to move forward, a mass of perhaps seven thousand men, women and children. They are so sure of the issue of the battle, should this be accepted, that the women drive horses harnessed to travails⁸ on which they are to carry off the booty.

The die is cast; a struggle, a terrible struggle cannot be avoided. Hence the priest goes among his

⁸Two poles lashed at one end to each side of a horse, the other ends trailing on the ground, and connected by a hurdle destined to receive a load.

people; speaks to them of God who can protect them if they implore His help, and to cheer them on to resistance, he tells them of the known cowardice of all Indians when in presence of a resolute foe. And then, as no bravery can avail against such numbers, he vows in the name of the camp to observe a solemn fast and to sing three high masses if they should escape.

In spite of all efforts to stop them by friendly remonstrances, the Sioux continue their advance. Several are now within gunshot range. One especially bold precedes all others and wants evidently to win the honour of having first penetrated into the halfbreed camp. Vainly is he warned not to advance any nearer; he is bound to rush at the doomed circle. A bullet lays him low, and Laflèche recognizes in him one of the two Sioux whose lives he has saved.

His people now swear to avenge his death. They precipitate themselves in the direction of the half-breeds while discharging their arms; but they soon recoil before the deadly and better directed fire of Laflèche's people. They then spread out and surround at a distance the improvised fort of carts and earthen breastworks. Will the besieged withstand long their furious attack? It is now a veritable hail of bullets and arrows that rain down on the wooden bulwark and the heaps of earth. The halfbreeds are excellent shots; they spare their ammunition and strive to make every bullet find a victim.

To the horrible war songs, the hideous yells and war whoops of the Sioux chiefs the halfbreeds answer with deafening hurrahs whenever they have evidence that their own missiles are well directed. Vainly does the enemy attempt to storm them; a deadly volley issues from the camp, whose defenders realize perfectly well that if the enemy comes too near they are doomed.

Even the missionary seems under the effect of the smell of powder. "I had not deemed it proper to shoulder a musket on account of my character," he wrote afterwards; "but I was determined that, at the supreme moment, I would raise my axe on the head of the first rascal that would dare touch my cart."⁹

Fortunately that supreme moment did not come. After six hours of a terrible fusillade, the Sioux began to lose heart. In the midst of the fight they were clearly heard to say:

"You have with you a Manitou that protects you."

So they desisted and gradually retired with their dead and wounded, carrying them off in the vehicles which they had intended for the rich booty of which they felt so sure.

The halfbreeds had only three men slightly wounded, in addition to one of the imprudent scouts, who was found pierced with sixty-seven arrows and

⁹Mr. Lafleche to a friend, St. Francois-Xavier, 4th Sept., 1851.

three bullets.¹⁰ His feet and hands had been cut off and taken away, while the rest of the body was horribly mutilated. But in that battle and another affray that followed as the halfbreeds were retiring to a large camp of their own people, the Sioux had no less than eighteen wounded and fifteen killed—others asserted later on that the latter figure should be fifty.

More pacific were the associations of Taché, the young Bishop of Arath, and less stirring the scenes that greeted him all over France and Italy. But his new dignity was only an inducement to a prompt return to the wilds of Northern America, as it meant work that others could not do. Moreover he had promised the fathers of Ile à la Crosse to be again with them in September, 1852.

He bade farewell in February to his venerable father in God, Bishop de Mazenod, and, after a long voyage through the American plains, which was perforce very devious on account of the Sioux who had become veritable pests, he reached St. Boniface, June 27, 1852. With him were an Oblate father, Henri Grollier, who was to become the great missionary of the Arctic Circle, and a young secular priest of whom we have already got a glimpse. This was Rev. Albert Lacombe who, after some time passed at Pembina with Mr. Belcourt, was now coming to consecrate his whole life to the service of the poor Indians under the ægis of Mary Immaculate.

¹⁰The two others who had been made prisoners had succeeded in effecting their escape.

His intention was to enter immediately the novitiate of the Oblates; but conquered by the entreaties of Monseigneur Provencher, who had nobody to put at Edmonton in the place of Mr. Thibault who wanted to leave the country, he finally agreed to postpone that step and accede to the poor prelate's wishes. Abandoning that post might have had disastrous consequences.

Meantime Thibault having consented to remain some time longer, he found in a different work an honourable retreat at St. François-Xavier, which Mr. Laflèche then left to remain with the bishop at St. Boniface.

The bishop and priest witnessed another terrible inundation, which caused all the more damage as the population was now getting denser. The whole country was temporarily transformed into a lake which, at Provencher's very door, was five feet deep. Day and night he could hear the waves beating against the stone walls of his home, as does the surf against the cliffs of the sea coast.¹¹ .

But having arrived long after the water had subsided, the new missionaries were spared the sight of the disaster. On the 8th of July,¹² Fathers Lacombe

¹¹Provencher to the Archbishop of Quebec, 6th July, 1852.

¹²There are several discrepancies in the dates of these various events in the printed documents. Thus, Bishop Taché says in his *Vingt Années de Missions* that he returned to St. Boniface on June 27th, while Abbé G. Dugas (*Monseigneur Provencher*, p. 275) makes that date the 4th July, which is evidently a mistake. On the other hand, the author of *Vingt Années de Missions* commits a *lapsus memoriae* in changing the 8th, the date of his departure, into the 10th.

and Grollier knelt at the feet of the venerable prelate, Mgr. Taché insisting on imitating them in spite of his new rank. This was the final parting of the first two Bishops of St. Boniface, who were to meet again only in heaven.

In the night of September 10th-11th, Mgr. Taché arrived at Ile à la Crosse with Father Grollier. His presence was badly needed there. We already know the fickleness of the aborigine, which is especially characteristic of the Déné race. In addition to this, the Chippewayans of Ile à la Crosse had been displeased at the successive departure of Taché, Lafleche and Faraud just when their knowledge of the language rendered their services more valuable. Two young priests who, of course, did not at first know a word of Chipewayan and had but common ability for acquiring it had taken their place, and their ignorance of the native dialect had rendered their ministry quite difficult. Hence discontent, murmurs against the frequent changes of pastors and consequent neglect of Christian duties on the part of the neophytes. Fortunately Bishop Taché's presence was soon to remedy everything.

As the young prelate was returning from Europe, Father Faraud, alone at Lake Athabasca, was dreaming of new conquests. He went down to Great Slave Lake, whither he was the first missionary to take the Glad Tidings. He was received with the greatest enthusiasm, and his preaching did a vast amount of good.

On his return to his Mission of the Nativity (Athabasca), he had the consolation of welcoming a fellow labourer in the person of Father Grollier, while at St. Boniface three other missionaries, Fathers Rémas and Végreille, accompanied by Brother Alexis Raynard were swelling the ranks of the Oblates who, by the end of 1852, counted eight priests and two lay brothers in the diocese of St. Boniface.

As to the head of that diocese, without being actually sick, he had constant presentiments that his end was approaching. The three great desires of his heart were now accomplished. He had religious, whose presence in the ranks of his clergy meant the perpetuation of the missions; he had nuns who watched over the education of the young, and finally a coadjutor with right to future succession rendered his mind easy concerning the eventuality of an early demise.

A fourth desideratum had lately taken possession of his thoughts. The priest who usually stayed with him at St. Boniface had so far had the direction of his college. But all were not equally qualified for that work, and he would have liked to obtain therefor the services of teaching brothers. His attention was called to the Brothers of St. Viateur, already established in Lower Canada. He endeavoured to have some of them come up to him; but after the losses caused by the inundation of 1852, his purse was in no position to meet the expenses consequent

on such an establishment. As death was already at his door he could not follow up that plan.

In the morning of May 19, 1853, he was getting up when he was suddenly prostrated by a stroke of apoplexy which left him unconscious on the floor of his room. This was on a Saturday. After regaining consciousness he could scarcely speak, and the following night he passed in sleeplessness. Yet he insisted on assisting at mass and saying his office, which his attendants, Mr. Laflèche and Father Bermond, had ultimately to allow him to recite, after they had concealed his breviary owing to his weak state.

He was half delirious most of that week, and received the last sacraments on the 24th. Later in the evening of June 7th, after having blessed his people, his absent priests and the sisters, he quietly breathed his last. Two days afterwards, a solemn requiem mass was sung in the sisters' chapel, and on the tenth his body was taken to the cathedral, where the final service was held in presence of Major Caldwell, Governor of Assiniboia, the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company present at Fort Garry and a large number of Protestants, in addition to the Catholics of St. Boniface and vicinity.

Useless to expatiate on the merits of the first Bishop of St. Boniface. He is judged by his works, and we now have some knowledge of them. He belonged to the old school of strict ecclesiastics, who knew no compromise when it was a question of

duty. He was noted for his devotedness to his flock, his good sense, an unaffected piety, and a great kindness of heart.¹³

¹³In proof of this last quality, we chose the following trait of his life: He had once killed a pig, which was left over night hanging under a shed. It might have been midnight when he was told by his servant that somebody was running away with it. Provencher was a powerful man, six feet four, and he soon overtook the fugitive with his appropriated load.

"Don't take it all away, it is all I have to eat," expostulated the bishop.

"So it is with me," said the thief; "my children have not eaten anything for the last two days."

"Well, that is not a reason for stealing. Take it back to the shed, and I will give you half of it, so that both of us will have something to eat."

Which was immediately done, and both were pleased, the one for having kept half of his animal, the other for having acquired the other half. (Geo. Dugas, *Monseigneur Provencher*, pp. 298, 299).

CHAPTER XV.

BISHOP TACHE SUCCEEDS BISHOP PROVENCHER.

1853-1856.

Bishop Taché was barely thirty years of age when, by the death of Monseigneur Provencher, he exchanged his distant See of Arath for that of St. Boniface. Except in official parchments, the former was a thing of the past, and, considered as a city, the latter had as yet but a future existence. St. Boniface then consisted merely of the cathedral and adjoining Bishop's House, a convent inhabited by eleven sisters, some of whom were taking care of the sick who lodged with them; one or two houses, where dwelt or were soon to dwell, Messrs. Narcisse Marion and Amable Thibault, a brother to the veteran missionary of the same name, together with a few cabins along the Seine River. All the other parishioners, to the number of about eleven hundred souls, were scattered on their farms or more or less cultivated plots of land on the banks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers.

Besides the parish of St. Boniface, there was that of St. François-Xavier, on the White Horse Plain, which boasted a log church 80 by 33, and a convent with two nuns for a population of almost nine hundred. This post was situated some eighteen miles

from St. Boniface. Between these two points was the nucleus of a new parish that was to be founded the following year by the building of a presbytery. This was St. Charles, then known as Sturgeon River, which might have had slightly less than two hundred inhabitants. The elements of a fourth parish were along the Red River, nine miles along its confluence with the Assiniboine. The place went by the name of Sale (or Dirty) River, and in 1854 the materials for a church and priest's house were first prepared, which in course of time were to give place to the present edifice at St. Norbert. That circumscription had about nine hundred of a population.

St. Charles was attended from St. François-Xavier, and one of the priests at St. Boniface usually visited St. Norbert.

The Indian missions with resident priests then in existence were Ste. Anne, forty-five miles west of Edmonton; St. John the Baptist, at Ile à la Crosse, and the Nativity, on Lake Athabasca, each of which had a number of dependencies or outposts regularly visited by the incumbents of the missions.

The relative importance of these missionary stations, as well as their Catholic population, may be gauged in a way by the approximate number of baptisms administered in a year. There was about one hundred and twenty for St. Boniface; sixty for St. François-Xavier; from seventy-five to eighty for Ile à la Crosse and seventy for Lake Athabasca. On the first of January, 1854, the total number of baptisms

to the credit of the Indian missions, apart from St. Boniface and St. François-Xavier, was 4,309.

As to the clergy for these various stations and dependencies, it consisted of four secular priests: Messrs. Thibault, on Red River; Bourassa, at St. François-Xavier; Laflèche, at St. Boniface, and Lacombe, at Ste. Anne. To these were now added seven Oblate fathers, namely: Bermond, at St. Boniface; Faraud and Grollier, at Lake Athabasca; Tissot and Maisonneuve, at Ile à la Crosse; Végrerville and Rémas, just arrived.

Father Maisonneuve having fallen sick had to be sent back to headquarters at St. Boniface; but his companion Father Tissot was very active and preached in the fall of 1853, a one month mission to the Crees of Green Lake, with results which might have been more satisfactory, though the missionary did not complain of the attendance at the religious exercises.

As to Bishop Taché he was not to leave the north, and especially Ile à la Crosse, for his new See before he had consolidated the good work already commenced. The very night he had heard of the demise of Mgr. Provencher, after having dispatched letters of vicar-general to Father Bermond, to whom he gave full power to administer the property of the Church in Red River, he set out with Brother Alexis for Lake Athabasca. Arrived at the Mission of the Nativity, he commissioned Father Grollier to go and establish a post at the eastern extremity of the lake.

This was the origin of the Mission of Our Lady of Seven Dolours. It was founded for a tribe of Indians known as Caribou-Eaters.

In August Father Rémas left Red River for forts Cumberland, Carlton and Pitt, whence he proceeded to Lac Labiche, which had been periodically visited between 1844 and 1852. Father Rémas may be considered the first permanent priest of that place, which is situated west of Ile à la Crosse, that is, near the point of intersection of the one hundred and twelfth degree of longitude and fifty-fifth degree of latitude. Most of its inhabitants were then half-breeds, together with Crees and Dénés.

But Bishop Taché was bent on visiting and organizing all his posts before he returned to St. Boniface. On February 27, 1854, he left his episcopal "palace" at Ile à la Crosse for a round of visitations which was to last upwards of three months. In this connection he has playfully described said palace thus: "It is twenty feet by twenty, and seven feet high, and smeared over with mud. This mud is not impermeable, so that rain, wind and other atmospheric elements have free access thereto. Two window sashes comprising six panes light the main apartment; two pieces of parchment serve for the remainder of the lighting system. In this palace, where everything seems small, everything is on the contrary stamped with a character of greatness. For instance my secretary is a bishop; my chamberlain is a bishop, and at times even my cook is a bishop."

These illustrious employees have all numerous defects; nevertheless their attachment to my person renders them dear to me. When they seem tired of their respective offices, I give them all an outing, and joining myself to them, I strive to divert them from their cares."¹

That journey of inspection led the young prelate first to Fort Pitt, where he was a sorrowful witness to the ravages of intoxicating liquors among the Indians, and thence to Fort Edmonton, which had been placed under the vocable of St. Joachim. There he met Mr. Lacombe and confirmed seventeen persons (March 25th). Two days later he went out by dog train to Ste. Anne's Mission, where Father Rémas awaited him. Mr. Lacombe having heard of his pitiful situation at Lac la Biche, had snatched him away from there in time to receive his bishop. By the description of Mgr. Taché's palace, we may form an idea of what that poor father's abode may have been.

The bishop's visit to Ste. Anne's was marked by the baptism, on Holy Saturday, of twenty-two adults and the confirming of ninety-eight persons, who had but lately renounced heresy or paganism.

Thence Father Rémas accompanied His Lordship to his rudiment of a mission by the shore of Lac la Biche. May 1st, steps were taken with a view to remedying to some extent the indescribable wretch-

¹*Vingt Années de Missions*, pp. 59, 60.



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Bishop of St. Boniface.

edness which had fallen to the lot of the pious incumbent of the new post.

Two weeks later, Bishop Taché was entering again his famous palace at Ile à la Crosse. Then Father Tissot gave a successful mission at Methy Portage, while Father Végreille, who had already acquired some knowledge of the Chippewayan language, was making his first campaign at Cold Lake.

Bishop Taché had been writing to his beloved father, Mgr. de Mazenod, pressing letters asking for more evangelical labourers. In answer to these requests, a young priest, tall and dignified, though of modest deportment, was in August being welcomed at St. Boniface by his brother Oblates, Fathers Bermond and Maisonneuve (who was still on the sick list). This was Vital J. Grandin,² a priest who had been rejected by the Seminary of Foreign Missions, as unfitted for missionary work by his weak constitution, and who was to yield some forty-eight years of the most meritorious and fruitful labours in North America.

With him came three brothers of the Christian schools. Their advent had been made possible by the generosity of Mgr. Bourget, Bishop of Montreal,

²Vital Julien Grandin was born at St. Pierre-sur-Orthe, diocese of Laval, France, on the 8th of Feb., 1829. After studying at the Lesser Seminary of Précigné, he entered (21st Sept., 1851) the Seminary of Foreign Missions at Paris, which he soon had to leave on account of bad health. He then entered the novitiate of the Oblates, 28th Dec., 1851, and was admitted into their Congregation by his final vows, which he pronounced on the 1st of Jan., 1853. April 24th of the following year he was elevated to the priesthood by Bishop de Mazenod.

who had caused a collection to be made in his diocese, which netted a sum of £364. For the lack of special quarters, the brothers were at first lodged in the bishop's residence.

Taché had not as yet taken formal possession of his See of St. Boniface. As this step could not be postponed any longer, he left Ile à la Crosse, September 26th, and on the following 3rd of November he was kneeling in his cathedral "to offer up to the Lord," as he said, "his desire to serve Him and pray that that desire might be made efficient."

Ten days later (November 13, 1854), Mr. Laflèche left for Canada "with the express understanding that he should come back the following spring."³ Bishop Taché deplored the abandonment of the mission of martyred Darveau, which had resulted in many of the converts passing out to Protestantism. With a view to resuming it, he had requested Mr. Laflèche to do all he could to bring two priests from Canada. In this, however, Laflèche was unsuccessful.

During his absence was commenced, in the last days of May, 1855, the construction of the college building, which measured 60 by 34, and, three years later, sheltered fifty-eight pupils. Then as the cost of travelling and forwarding the annual outfit of the missions of Lake Athabasca was exceedingly great, it was decided that the establishment of Lac la Biche should be put on such a footing that, not only that

³Letter from Taché to the Archbishop of Quebec, 13th Nov., 1854.

post and the projected missions might profit by the local resources, but that a system of transportation thence to the north should be organized with a view to curtailing expenses and ensuring some measure of independence from the Hudson's Bay Company.

Fathers Tissot and Maisonneuve were entrusted with the organization and development of that establishment, while Father Rémas would take charge of Lake Ste. Anne and become at the same time master of novices to Father Lacombe. And as it was evident that new stations should in the near future be founded on the Mackenzie and Peace Rivers, Father Grandin left St. Boniface for Athabasca, where he should at first watch over the mission while Father Faraud would explore the country.

He therefore bade farewell to Red River in the beginning of June in the company of Bishop Taché, who was returning to Ile à la Crosse. Brother Bowes, a new arrival, was also a member of the little party, but stayed over at Ile à la Crosse till he had put the last touches to the church of that place.

Meanwhile Father Lacombe had visited the neophytes of Lesser Slave Lake and Peace River. On his return to Ste. Anne's, he commenced (September 23, 1855), a novitiate in the course of which fervour and good-will had to replace to a certain extent the execution of certain canonical prescriptions incompatible with the situation of both master and disciple.

At St. Boniface, Father Bermond had seen with pleasure the return of Mr. Laflèche by the end of May, 1855. On the following 19th of October, he welcomed a precious recruit in the person of Father Jean-Marie J. Lestanc, whose arrival brought up to ten the number of professed Oblates within the diocese of St. Boniface. On the other hand, that of the secular priests had been reduced to two, Messrs. Laflèche and Bourassa, by the temporary departure of Mr. Thibault for Canada, after the return of Mr. Laflèche. By the end of 1856 only one, Rev. Mr. Thibault, remained in the diocese, both Laflèche and Bourassa having withdrawn for ever from the country where they had laboured for the last twelve years. They both left on June 1, 1856.

Thenceforth the episcopal palace at St. Boniface became practically a house for the Oblates who, for many a long year, ministered to the religious wants of the parish and neighbouring outposts. This was a sort of retreat which, for dangers, sufferings and privations of all sorts, could not bear comparison with any of the northern missions.

The presence of Father Grandin at the Nativity permitted of multiplying those stations. Farther north, seemed then the order of the day. In consequence, Father Faraud left, April 11, 1856, Lake Athabasca for Great Slave Lake. Even at that relatively late date in the season, winter was still in full sway in those high latitudes, and the trip was made on snowshoes and by dog's train.

Arrived at Great Slave Lake the missionary stopped in front of Fort Resolution, the Hudson's Bay Company's trading house, where a difficulty of a delicate nature awaited him. We have already seen that the authorities of that corporation were not all favourably disposed towards the Catholic missions. Many of the local officers were not only courteous but generous to the priests, admitting them to board and lodging as if they had belonged to their own denominations. But the officer in charge of the immense Mackenzie District, which comprised Great Slave Lake, G. A. Anderson, had declared that he would admit no Catholic priest within his domains, and he gave orders to his subordinate officers never to receive them under their roofs. Hence the embarrassment of the commander at Fort Resolution at the sight of Father Faraud.

Yet in those inhospitable regions, where the native population was nomadic, that is, without a single house, and the few traders were the only whites, it would have been inhuman to refuse at least a shelter to a representative of their race especially in the winter time, when the thermometer generally hovers between 20 and 55 degrees Fahrenheit.

When he heard of the ukase of the northern potentate, Bishop Taché applied to his superior, Sir George Simpson, who at first affected to make light of the young prelate's representations. But Taché insisted in such a way that the "Emperor of British North America," as Simpson was sometimes called,

saw his mistake, and at the same time realized that he was now treating with a master mind, who must not be trifled with. He readily granted the bishop's request, and replaced Anderson's prohibitive directions by "a letter of recommendation for the clerk in charge of the post, enjoining him to treat the missionary with kindness and second him in the establishing of the mission."⁴

This explains how it is that Father Faraud felt much more at ease than the *bourgeois* of Fort Resolution when they first met. An exhibition of the governor's orders had soon broken the ice, inasmuch as, personally, the local man had no animosity against the Catholic missionaries.

FATHER FARAUD'S SIGNATURE.

Father Faraud, in addition to his aptitudes for the acquirements of languages, had no small abilities as a carpenter. He had himself put up his establishment at the Nativity; he repeated his exploit on Moose Island, Great Slave Lake, which he chose for the site of his new mission. This he dedicated to St. Joseph. The place was now ready for the future apostles whom obedience would lead to that far-off station. After a sojourn of three months, during

⁴Taché to De Mazenod, 9th Feb., 1855.

which the souls of the native population were far from neglected, the carpenter priest returned to young Father Grandin. In spite of his inexperience, the new missionary had fully maintained the Mission of Nativity up to its usual standard of efficiency.

Less satisfactory was the position of Fathers Maisonneuve and Tissot at Lac la Biche. It became evident that the site of their mission had been ill-chosen. Hence during the winter of 1855-56, it was moved about six miles from the fort that stood on that lake. But this very circumstance, which was meant to improve their position, momentarily made things worse for the good fathers, who were now without a roof in the middle of winter. To console and buoy them up, Bishop Taché visited them, and shared for a few days their excessive privations. While living in a tent pitched on the snow, they had hurriedly put up a cabin to receive their superior. When Taché arrived they did not even possess a chair; a wooden block served as an episcopal seat.

But this great poverty was nothing to the good bishop in comparison to the sorrow with which he contemplated the emaciated faces of his two missionaries, which he soon perceived was the result of sheer lack of nourishment and other privations.

Their penury did not long stand in the way of the material improvements that had been projected for their establishment. With a courage that cannot be too much admired, both missionaries, after the de-

parture of their first pastor, gave themselves up to the task of clearing large patches of land, which were soon under cultivation. They also erected the many buildings necessary to a place that was intended as the great emporium of the northern missions. They even opened (1856) a cart road through the thick forest which surrounded their lake, and, in September, Father Maisonneuve astonished the good people of Fort Pitt by paying them his annual visit after having driven all the way from Lac la Biche. This road was the first work of its kind in the whole north, and it became an incentive to other parties to undertake similar conveniences of civilization.

From Lac la Biche Bishop Taché made for Lake Athabasca, which he reached on the feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin. The Indians who frequented that mission received him in a body, together with a few who had come from Fond du Lac or Mission of Our Lady of the Seven Dolours. Taché had been their very first missionary; they were now as delighted as Fathers Grollier and Grandin to see him with the rank of a "Great Prayer Man." Soon Father Faraud arrived who, by the good news he brought concerning the north, put everybody in good spirits. After the regular mission exercises, a week was spent in working for the Indians. By day they were instructed, and the nights were devoted to the preparation for the



PRESENT MISSION BUILDINGS AT FORT CHIPPEWAYAN, L. ATHABASCA.

printer of some books already composed in their language.

These poor people were so much nearer the kingdom of God as they had remained simple and uncontaminated by contact with depraved whites. Simple they were indeed, and in after years Father Faraud delighted in recalling the fright that had possessed an improvised sexton of his, when he happened to ring a bell the priest had hung during the Indian's absence. The latter no sooner heard it answer to his pull than he ran off as if thunderstruck. Another Déné had been some time with the missionary, who commissioned him to impart to the people of his distant tribe the instruction he had received at the mission. Soon, however, he was back again, begging for Father Faraud's cap.

"People will not believe me," he said; "but when they see me with your own cap, they will realize that I cannot possibly be deceiving them."

Others had deemed it excellent policy to shave the crown of their head in imitation of the priestly tonsure.

"Surely I must be approaching perfection when I do what the priest does," they naively reasoned.

On the 22nd of August the bishop was again welcomed at St. Boniface by Father Bermond, who was glad to introduce to him the latest recruit from France, Father Lestanc. Another addition to the ranks of the Oblates the following winter delighted their vicar of missions. This was not a newcomer;

yet everyone was pleased to hear that he had a new brother in the person of Father Lacombe, O.M.I., who pronounced his vows in September, 1856.

In the course of his episcopal visitation Mgr. Taché had taken the census of the population of Ile à la Crosse. As it was fairly representative of that found in the other missions with resident priests, we herewith reproduce it. It will at the same time illustrate the practical results of the missionaries' efforts, and silence such as might be tempted to belittle their labours.

	Christians.	Catechumens.	Heathens.	Souls.
Chippewayans	350	22	47	419
Crees	100	30	about 100	230
Halfbreeds	78	1	1	80
French-Canadians	6	0	0	6
	<hr/> 534	<hr/> 53	<hr/> 148	<hr/> 735

There were then only five Protestants at that post, probably the Hudson's Bay Company's clerk (Mr. Roderick McKenzie) and his family.

Bishop Taché had also been edified at the evidences he had seen of the great respect his priests had succeeded in inspiring into the minds of their flocks. An old woman of Athabasca was bewailing her fate after the loss of her son. Father Grandin having heard of her misfortune tried to console her by the promise that, after due preparation, he would admit her to her first communion. She looked askance at the young priest, as if she did not realize the import of his words.

Thinking that he had not expressed himself in the

proper language, the missionary hailed a passer-by who, being a halfbreed, knew both French and Chipewayan.

"I can make myself understood about everything except one point," he said in his native tongue. "This old woman cannot make out what I mean when I say that I shall prepare her for her first communion."

"Oh! yes; I did understand the Praying One," immediately corrected the woman, when the priest's words had been interpreted to her. "But I thought that surely he must make a mistake and did not mean what he said. For who could have supposed that a poor old creature like myself might ever be granted such a great favour?"

But it was written that Bishop Taché should not stay long at St. Boniface. After having spent three weeks there, he was off again, this time for Europe, whither most important business called him (September 14, 1856).

CHAPTER XVI.

SUCCESSES AND TRIALS.

1857-1859.

According to the modern discipline of the Church, a bishop gets a coadjutor chiefly because of old age and consequent inability to perform the duties of his charge. In 1856 Mgr. Taché was probably the youngest bishop of the whole Catholic world. He was blessed with good health and very active dispositions. He could not therefore invoke age or infirmities as a pretext for getting an auxiliary. But a no less pressing reason was the extraordinary size of his diocese—1520 miles by 1300—the lack of means of communication, and the growing necessity of extending the limits of the missionary field in the north.

Taché, therefore, resolved to beg for that favour, and the better to succeed in the pursuance of his ends, he left (September 11, 1856), for Canada and Europe. In Canada he caused the hierarchy to draw up a petition to the Holy See, praying that a coadjutor be granted him. But, out of regard for his Oblate superior, Mgr. de Mazenod, he asked that the name of the candidate be not mentioned therein, as he intended to leave the choice of the same to the Superior-General of the Order to which now belonged practically all his missionaries.

On December 20, 1856, he was at the feet of his father in God, to whom he communicated his designs. After having prayed for heavenly light, Bishop de Mazenod came to the conclusion that, in spite of his youth, Father Grandin was the proper person for that exalted station, and he sent his name to Rome as that of the most worthy priest therefor.

Another measure which the missionary prelate negotiated at Marseilles was the establishing of the Grey Nuns in each of the Oblate missions. These good religious had proved invaluable to the missionaries of the Red River. Not only did they teach the young, but they reared the orphans, treated the sick, took care of the sacristies, and rendered their spiritual fathers those innumerable little services which are so appreciated in roughly organized, out-of-the-way places as are the Indian missions. Bishop Provencher had been exceptionally fortunate in his choice of an Institute of sisters for his adopted country. The Grey Nuns did not confine their activities to any particular kind of work, but were ever ready to assist in any way to the best of their abilities. The two bishops came to an agreement at Marseilles, whereby the sisters' sphere of usefulness could be extended on behalf of most of the missions.

After his formal meeting with his Superior-General, Bishop Taché entered upon a tour of preaching through France, whereby his own distant field of labour was materially benefited. Then as now the

French were apt to go to extremes; but they always professed admiration for the self-denial of an apostle. The missionary bishop could not help noticing it. "It is wonderful how great an amount of good is done in France," he wrote. "Generosity and devotion are characteristic of the French nation. May God protect her and render her worthy of the rôle which must be hers in the world!"¹¹

He also visited some houses of his Order within the British Isles, and likewise came in contact with some of the members of the famous Hudson's Bay Company Committee in London. There he further met Sir George Simpson, who graciously granted him a free passage for two fathers and one brother from London to York Factory.

During his visit to Canada he repeated his exertions on behalf of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. Not only was he successful from a financial standpoint, but he made the acquisition of a young priest who was to pass over fifty years in his distant missions. This was Rev. Zéphyrin Gascon, who soon after made a sort of deambulating novitiate in the Mackenzie district, before he could add the magical O. M. I. to his name.

The prelate also improved his opportunity by perfecting arrangements for the sending of sisters to the most desolate Oblate posts. He did not conceal from the authorities of the Grey Nuns that existence there was exceedingly precarious, in fact, an unend-

¹¹To his mother; Paris, 18th Dec., 1856.

ing series of privations of all kinds; but nothing could deter them from proceeding in the path of sacrifice in which they had entered.

Taché's stay in Canada lasted five months, part of which was employed in superintending the printing of those Indian books which we have seen him preparing at Athabasca, in the company of Father Faraud. Thus were printed Cree primers and books of devotion in Roman type, and Chippewayan booklets in syllabic characters. These were in after years to singularly facilitate instruction among the children of the frozen North.

On his return, he passed one day with that devoted, but unsuccessful, missionary, Rev. Mr. Belcourt, whom he found "in a most painful position" at Pembina. On November 6, 1857, he was again resting in the shadow of the cathedral with the "turrets twain" at St. Boniface.

Great was his joy in finding himself in the midst of brother Oblates and collaborators, though that joy was somewhat tempered by the absence of a familiar face which had disappeared during his voyage. After eleven years of devotion to the cause of the missions, Father Bermond had left Red River on the 25th of August preceding the bishop's return. His great administrative talents and the solidity of his judgment had singled him out as a fit party to send on an official visit in the name of the Superior-General of the Oblates, to the establishments his Institute possessed on the Pacific coast. The wise

regulations he then drew up for the guidance of his brother missionaries are still quoted with reverence by the successors of the pioneer Oblates of British Columbia. His task accomplished west of the Rocky Mountains, Father Bermond returned to France.²

The loss of so precious a subject was compensated for by the arrival at St. Boniface of Fathers Frain and Eynard, accompanied by Brother Kearney. Those missionaries had profited by the generosity of the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, crossing, first of all Catholic priests since the days of Rev. Mr. Bourke, from London to Hudson Bay. They reached Red River about a month before the bishop's own return. Two months earlier still, Father Bermond had himself welcomed Father Lefloch, the scholastic Brother Isidore Clut, and the two lay Brothers Salasse and Perréard.

These recruits allowed of the final erection of St. Norbert into a regular parish. Father Lestanc, who had momentarily succeeded Father Bermond at the head of the Oblate community, was named to the new post, with Father Eynard and Brother Kearney as assistants. The others awaited at St. Boniface their obedience for some northern mission. Meanwhile, Bro. Clut was admitted to the priesthood, December 20, 1857. This ordination brought the number of professed Oblate fathers in the diocese up to fourteen. There were moreover two secular

²Where he was appointed superior of one of the most important of the houses of his Order.

priests, the veteran Mr. Thibault and the new arrival, Mr. Gascon. Furthermore, the material side of the various establishments was looked after by lay brothers, of whom the same territory now counted six.

At the civil capital thereof, Fort Garry, just opposite St. Boniface, the bishop found cause for congratulation in the results he witnessed of the education given by his predecessor. Ever since 1855, François Bruneau, the pupil of Bishop Provencher, had occupied a seat in the colonial council, thus showing that, if the prelate had been unable to make priests of halfbreeds, he none the less succeeded in forming in the ranks of that race good, honourable men, respected by everybody;³ in short, men that were a credit to the education they had received.

Shortly before Taché's return, on September 19, 1857, three other halfbreeds had been admitted into the same select circle, by becoming members of the Council of Assiniboia. These were Pascal Breland, Maximilien Genton and Salomon Hamelin.

And lastly, Taché was himself received therein as successor to Bishop Provencher on June 3, 1858.

³François Bruneau had been a member of a committee appointed by L. Riel, in 1849, with a view to obtaining the liberation of W. Sayer. He died of typhoid fever, in the summer of 1863, together with eleven members of his family. The historian J. J. Hargrave says in this connection: "One of the most generally regretted victims was Mr. François Bruneau, a French halfbreed, and a most useful and respected justice of the peace. He was the leading counsellor selected from among those of his nationality and race, among whom his influence was very great" ("Red River," p. 349. Montreal, 1871).

His previous stay at Ile à la Crosse and consequent endless travels, first to the north and then to Europe, had not permitted of his taking sooner the place that was due him in that assembly.

In this connection, we might perhaps call attention to a slight alteration in the proceedings usual on similar occasions. Instead of recording an oath as having been taken by the bishop, the minutes of the council have it that "the Lord Bishop of St. Boniface affirmed that he would truly perform the duties of a counsellor of Assiniboia and took his seat as a counsellor." The reader will likewise notice the peculiar wording of that statement. We leave it to him to decide whether the change of councillor into counsellor was intentional, or simply the mistake of a scribe.

What does not seem to have been accidental on the part of the latter is the title of Lord Bishop given Mgr. Taché on this and all subsequent occasions. This roused the indignation of a Rev. Griffith Owen Corbett, the Anglican incumbent of Headingley, on the Assiniboine, who was destined to acquire, not long after, a most unenviable notoriety in the colony. In a local newspaper, the "Nor'-Wester," founded December 28, 1859, by two Canadians, Messrs. Buckingham and Coldwell, that clergyman protested against the bestowal on a Romish bishop of a title that was by law reserved for the prelates of the Anglican Church. Mr. Oram, a convert who had come up from Eastern Canada

to assist the Catholic teaching body, took up the gauntlet and defended in the same publication⁴ the action of the clerk of the council. In this task help came to him from a most unexpected quarter. This was no other than Louis Riel, the miller of the Seine,⁵ as he was beginning to be called, who, in a style that was far from classical, upheld likewise the wording of the minutes of said council.

As a result, it was generally conceded that Mr. Corbett had raised a tempest in a teapot, and Taché continued to be styled Lord Bishop.

Mgr. Taché was far from being a figure-head in that body. One of his first acts as a legislator was to present, in conjunction with the Bishop of Rupert's Land, a petition from the parishioners of St. John against the liquor evil, which was beginning again to take too tangible a form. Intoxicants were

⁴That sheet appeared only every fortnight, and the subscription price was originally twelve shillings a year.

⁵In view of the historical character of that halfbreed and his close relationship to the Louis Riel of 1870 and 1885, some unpublished details on the circumstances which led to his no less historical designation of "miller of the Seine," being applied to him, may prove acceptable. On Dec. 9th, 1852, he petitioned the Council of Assiniboia thus: "Your fulling mill has not been employed once for five years. As there is no appearance of more encouragement in the future, I take the liberty of addressing you this note, to know if you would sell it out. As I am about to build a water mill on the Seine River, that building would suit me well." This communication was signed Louis Rielle. In answer, the Bishop of St. Boniface, Mr. La Flèche and Dr. Bunn were appointed a committee to sell the building alone. On March 29th of the following year that committee "reported that Mr. Louis Rielle is willing to give £15 for everything but the mill itself, on condition of getting credit till December on his own personal security." Whereupon it was ordered that Mr. La Flèche advise him that he shall receive one pound sterling for removing the unsold part of the property, but that he must find for the remaining £14 such securities as may be satisfactory to Mr. La Flèche.

being imported from the United States, and it was asked that a tax be levied on each gallon coming thence, or that licenses, fixed at an almost prohibitive figure, be exacted for the sale thereof. A similar request was presented at the same time (December 9, 1858), from the parish of St. Andrews, while a third, in French, recited that a numerously attended meeting held in one of the halls of the bishop's palace at St. Boniface, three days before, had unanimously endorsed such a measure. One of the signers of the French document was a Mr. Amable Thebeault, probably Rev. Mr. Thibault's brother, then established, as we have seen, in St. Boniface.

That the Catholic schools for boys were not alone in turning out respectable citizens from the ranks of those halfbreeds who, at the first coming of the priests, were reputed no better than the Indians, was patent to all fair-minded Protestants. This is how the head of a party of civil engineers sent by the Government of Upper Canada, a Mr. S. J. Dawson, whose name has become ever since associated with a famous road from the Lake of the Woods to the Red River, referred to the sisters' own school which he visited in 1858:

“The Grey Nuns have a large establishment just opposite to the mouth of the Assiniboine, and another, a smaller one, at the White Horse Plains. The ladies devote themselves chiefly to the instruction of the children of mixed Canadian and Indian origin, and the effects of their zeal, piety and unfail-

THE BEGINNINGS OF A SCHOOL IN THE WEST



ing industry are manifest in the social improvement of the race, for whose benefit they are content to lead a life of toil and privation.”⁶

This appreciation of the Protestant gentleman could not be juster. For it may as well be remarked that the good nuns wielded as easily the scythe, and other agricultural implements, as those which are in our minds more usually associated with their sex, such as the needle, the combing-cards and the spinning-wheel.

Another even more distinguished traveller of the same faith as Mr. Dawson, the Earl of Southesk, visited Red River one year later. That gentleman was apparently as alive to the good derived from such institutions, though he viewed it from a somewhat different standpoint. His reference to the good sisters is typical, and will perhaps interest our lady readers. This is what he has in his journal, under date June 6, 1859:

“On Monday a very agreeable hour was spent by Dr. Rae and myself in visiting the Roman Catholic nunnery, following an introduction to the Lady Superior afforded us by Bishop Taché’s kindness. It was chiefly an educational establishment, managed by the nuns, who, I believe, were Sisters of Charity. They wore an extremely quaint and pretty dress. The close-fitting gown was of fawn-coloured cotton, with sleeves square and open at the wrist.

⁶“Report on the Exploration of the country between Lake Superior and the Red River,” p. 24. Toronto, 1859.

Over the gown was a dark blue cotton petticoat, with small white spots, which, reaching only to within six inches from the ground, showed a narrow strip of narrow fawn beneath. A heavy kerchief of black material covered the shoulders, and was crossed over the bosom; a black poke-bonnet, above a plain white cap, completed the costume. A gilt crucifix hung from a girdle round the waist. Mocassins were worn instead of shoes, according to the universal custom of the country, to which even the bishops conformed. These excellent nuns educated about forty children, mostly from among the French population. We had the pleasure of seeing a few of the pupils, whom Sister C——⁷ very obligingly sent for, asking them to give us some specimens of their progress in music. Two nice looking dark girls of fourteen came in, and played several pieces on a piano-forte, which, I confess, it surprised me to see in this remote and inaccessible land; two pretty little fair-haired children took their place, and, like the others, played in a pleasing and very creditable manner. The institution was universally spoken of as most useful and popular, and as being in all respects remarkably well conducted.”⁸

Mr. Dawson, as we have seen, refers to only two convents in Red River. Very shortly after his pass-

⁷Coutlée. It should be remarked that the noble visitor, when mentioning forty as the number of the pupils, must have referred only to the boarders.

⁸“Saskatchewan and the Rocky Mountains,” pp. 32, 33. Edinburgh, 1875.

age, a third was established, December 29, 1858, in the new parish of St. Norbert, with two nuns, Sisters Laurent and Dandurand, as foundresses. The bishop presided himself at their installation, after having bestowed on their institution a piece of land four chains wide and extending from the highway to the river, in addition to lands six chains wide and two miles long, on the eastern side of the Red.

While the bishop was thus inaugurating the policy of convent extension decided on at Marseilles, he did not lose sight of the main object of his trip to the country of his ancestors. Neither do we, though we now seem to have reached the end of the year 1858, and the subject had first been broached in 1856. As Father Grandin's name had been purposely left out of the Canadian bishops' petition, the Holy See required a written act of delegation of their rights to choosing the candidate in favour of the Bishop of Marseilles. Hence a delay which prevented Grandin from being appointed before December 11, 1857.

The loss of time was a great trial for Mgr. Taché, who seemed so much afraid lest another should be named at Rome that he wrote, March 15, 1857: "Should it not be certain that the Holy Father is going to name the first on the list [that is, Father Grandin], you should insist on having him."⁹

In December of that year, Mgr. de Mazenod's candidate was indeed appointed Bishop of Satala *in*

⁹To Bishop de Mazenod, Superior-General of the Oblates.

partibus infidelium and coadjutor to Mgr. Taché with right of future succession; but at that time the humble and retiring missionary was probably the one of the priests in the diocese of St. Boniface who least dreamed of such a promotion. Yet God, who "chooses the weak of the world,"¹⁰ had set him apart as the elect of His heart, because of his innate simplicity and innocence, to which were now added a zeal and devotion to duty which had already stood the test of the most severe ordeals.

"Do you sometimes think of God, my child?" a great prelate and famous theologian¹¹ had long before asked of young Grandin.

To which the poor lad, trembling at the thought of his remissness, had answered with a blush:

"At times I do not," a reply truly sublime in its simplicity.

But God did think of him, and so did his superiors. In prevision of his forthcoming elevation, he had been ordered to Ile à la Crosse, where he learnt of it in July, 1858. Useless to tarry on his extreme astonishment, and describe his protestations on receiving such unexpected intelligence. Those who have personally known the saintly Grandin may well imagine his misgivings, not to say terror, on that occasion.

Even if he had been accessible to attacks of

¹⁰1 Cor. i. 27; words which were chosen by Bishop Grandin as the motto of his coat-of-arms.

¹¹Mgr. Bouvier, Bishop of Le Mans, France.

vainglory, circumstances just then so shaped themselves at Ile à la Crosse that he would soon have been hurled from his pedestal. We have already had occasion to mention one spell of uneasiness among the neophytes of that mission. For the second time, always on account of changes in their clergy, some of them had shown signs of discontent that bordered on insubordination, when, of a sudden, a most unusual event converted this into open revolt.

We know that all American aborigines, but especially the Dénés, have the strongest faith in dreams, and are otherwise extremely credulous. One morning a young man of Ile à la Crosse woke up with the firm persuasion that he was the Son of God, and, strange to say, he found many partizans in his own tribe. In a short time everything was upside down among the natives; at his bidding, his followers burnt down all their possessions, killed their dogs, destroyed their furs, and did away with their best pieces of wearing apparel.

This took place some distance from the mission. To cut away the evil in its roots and prevent the expansion of the movement, Father Grandin thought it incumbent on himself to go and confute the offspring of *Saskhe* (Bearfeet) who pretended to be the Son of God. As soon as the energumen saw him:

“Come on, my son,” he cried out; “come on, and

I shall make you see wonders. You shall see the tables of Moses. *Theos! Theos!*"¹²

He had in his hands a magical roll of birch rind fully six feet long, with which he assaulted the missionary, who had to beat a hasty retreat to his canoe. Then as one of Grandin's men had not been able to embark, the priest went back to show the people that they had to deal with an impostor or an unbalanced mind, since the son of Bearfeet could not make good his boast that he knew all languages. He questioned him in French and Latin; but the Indian avoided the test by remarking that such languages were not made for Chippewayans, and that he did not see the advisability of showing in presence of such poor people his proficiency in the same.

Yet the reasoning powers of his compatriots seemed to have been momentarily obscured by the workings of an over-excited imagination. Nevertheless even in the throng of Indians in the midst of whom he stood, Grandin found at least one old man who had remained proof against the contagion.

"They advised me to go and see the Son of God," he confidentially said to the priest; "when I came, I recognized the son of Bearfeet. Then, as he insisted in striking me with his pretended table of commandments, to impart his spirit to me, and exhorted me to part with everything I had, I could not help saying in a low voice: 'If thou art really the Son of

¹²Greek word meaning God, which the Indian had probably acquired from the service on Good Friday, when they are used by the Church.

God, may thou return forthwith to heaven, and leave us alone on earth!" "

The psychological epidemic gradually abated, in proportion as the novelty wore off; but the missionary felt deeply disturbed in mind by the way people were duped and imposed upon to whom he had been so kind, and who had so far responded so unanimously to his exertions on their behalf. We hasten to add that, with time, not only the visionary's relations, but even the poor deluded author of the whole trouble returned to the fold.

This, however, did not happen before Father Grandin had become the Bishop of Satala, by the consecration he received at the hands of Mgr. de Mazenod at Marseilles, on November 30, 1859.

This was indeed a consoling event for Mgr. Taché, who just then stood in great need of consolations. We have already chronicled the numerous arrivals of Oblates in the course of 1857. This unusual influx of evangelical labourers seems to have been pre-ordained of God, to place his representative in the Northwest in a position to efficaciously face the storm that was at hand in the very farthest post of his diocese. In 1858 an event which took everybody by surprise rendered the services of all the newcomers into the vineyard of the Lord especially welcome. Suddenly it was learned that an archdeacon of the Church of England, the Rev. James Hunter, was going north, bent on proselytizing among the Indians in favour of his own sect. He passed by the

Catholic stations of Ile à la Crosse, Athabasca and Great Slave Lake, and went as far as Fort Simpson, in the very heart of the Mackenzie district. Anderson had now his revenge for the humiliation inflicted on him by the young Bishop of St. Boniface.

A full acquaintance with both the northern officer and the clergyman who became his tool makes it hard to believe that any other motive animated the former in the course of the transaction which resulted in the unexpected step taken by the latter. On the other hand, zeal for the salvation of souls could scarcely have been the moving spirit with Mr. Hunter. First of all, he promised his services only for the period of one year. Then an eminent Protestant could not help remarking to Mgr. Taché: "I cannot understand this. There is no zeal in that man; his going there is nothing but the token of a mere spirit of opposition to you."¹³

Be this as it may, the danger was clear; it was urgent to minimize it as much as possible. To attain that end, not a few changes in the personnel of the Oblates became necessary. Father Clut had already been sent to Athabasca, where he took the place of Father Grollier, now entrusted with the mission of St. Joseph, on Great Slave Lake, with Father Eynard and Brother Perréard as assistants. Father Grollier was physically a small man, polite as a

¹³*Vingt Années de Missions*, p. 104, where the author quotes the gentleman in his original English, thereby implying that he reproduces his very words.

Frenchman and timid as one who realized that, while in the land of foes, he sadly lacked familiarity with their language. But the little Frenchman was full of zeal and pluck. He did not shrink from the task of measuring swords with the portly archdeacon in the very camp of his adversaries. He immediately went down to Fort Simpson, and, as a result of his exertions on behalf of truth, he had the consolation of seeing nearly all the Indians side with him and profit by his daily instructions, in spite of the opposition of *bourgeois* and clerks. He put that post under the protection of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; but, unfortunately for the perseverance of his catechumens, the lack of permanent lodgings forced him to return to the Great Slave Lake Mission.

CHAPTER XVII.

“UNTO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD.”

1859-1860.

At St. Boniface, still other labourers were arriving from France and Ireland. These were Fathers Mestre and Moulin, who had for a companion Brother Cunningham, while, somewhat later, that is, by the end of October, 1858, six Grey Nuns, under the leadership of their provincial superior, came to swell the ranks of their sisters on the Red River, pending the organization of the projected foundations in the north.

A widening of the field of action corresponded with this increase in the ministerial and teaching personnel. That same autumn, Father Faraud left his mission of Lake Athabasca to visit the nomadic tribe of the Beavers, already evangelized by Rev. Mr. Bourassa. At the same time the employees of Fort Vermillion and Dunvegan profited by his ministry. A “walk” of seventeen days on snowshoes took him back to his headquarters at the Nativity.

Then, in order to forestall the minister, Father Grandin was likewise arming himself with those awkward, if necessary, adjuncts to winter travelling on the snows of the north, and, in March, 1859, was visiting Fort Rae, whose Indians had never

been evangelized. This place he confided to the care of the great enemy of revolt and protestation against lawful authority, the Archangel St. Michael.¹

Nearer the centre of civilization in the Middle West, the base of a parish was laid by the visits of Father Lefloch to a group of halfbreeds who had settled at Pointe-des-Chênes, or Oak Point. The year 1859 saw these humble beginnings of a place which, in course of time, was to develop into the flourishing parish of Ste. Anne des Chênes. The latter name was due to the nationality of its first pastor, a Breton, and therefore a great servant of St. Ann.

Meanwhile, the young priest whom Mgr. Taché had brought from Canada, Rev. Mr. Gascon, had been soliciting the favour of entering the Congregation of the Oblates. In compliance with his request, he was allowed to commence, March 9, 1859, the somewhat irregular novitiate to which we have already alluded. The start was made at St. Norbert under the able and pious Father Lestanc. But the new novice was not destined to remain long in the solitude of that place. In returning from the north, after his year of efforts on behalf of Protestantism, Archdeacon Hunter was bringing to the headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Garry a petition from the officers of the Mackenzie district to the effect that the Catholic priests should be de-

¹This post was well guarded. In 1865 a Protestant mission was established there, which had to be abandoned owing to the fidelity of the Indians to the teaching of their first apostle.

barred from working in that far-off land. The arch-deacon was replaced by a Red River schoolmaster, a Mr. W. W. Kirkby, who was ordained for the occasion, and proved to be a most active and resourceful man. His going north surprised the missionaries, who had fondly hoped that Hunter's discomfiture had taught a lesson to his co-religionists.

On the other hand, thanks to the intervention of Bishop Taché, instead of the object of the traders' petition being attained, permission was granted to one of the Catholic priests to pass the winter at one of the Company's farthest posts. So that an individual who had asked for the expulsion of the Catholic missionaries from the northernmost district had actually to lodge one of them under his own roof.

That missionary was the intrepid Father Grollier. He left Fort Resolution, visited his outpost of the Sacred Heart at Fort Simpson, and, descending the giant stream of the great northland, passed by Fort Norman, which he put under the patronage of St. Theresa, and reached Fort Good Hope, just within the Arctic Circle, where he spent the winter of 1859-60. This was the origin of the famous Mission of Our Lady of Good Hope, whence Grollier was ultimately to bid farewell to its frozen steppes for a better world.

Meanwhile, through the instrumentality of the devoted priest, the Glad Tidings had been taken considerably over two thousand miles away from

St. Boniface. The prediction of the Royal Prophet "their words [have reached] unto the ends of the world"²² was nearing fulfilment.

But this displacement of the superior of St. Joseph's Mission had created a void at Great Slave Lake. To fill it up, the novice, Father Gascon, was sent thither, and put under the direction of Father Eynard. Father Végreville had then the charge of Ile à la Crosse, while Father Rémas was temporarily at St. Boniface, whence he started, August 3, 1859, with three nuns who were to be the nucleus of a new establishment at his own mission of Ste. Anne. These were Sisters Emery, Lamy and Alphonse. After a voyage which involved many of the inconveniences proper to the country, difficulties arising from a most disagreeable season as well as from the fatigue incident to such peregrinations, the party reached Ste. Anne September 24, 1859.

Little more than a month before the arrival of the courageous nuns, Father Rémas' confrères had greeted a newcomer of a different kind. This was the same Earl of Southesk whose appreciation of the nuns' costume and efficiency at St. Boniface we have already recorded. The English nobleman was no less struck by what he saw at the western mission. A disinterested visitor, in spite of his very strong anti-Catholic prejudices, he could not help comparing the work and person of the poor priests

²²Psalm xviii. 5.

with what he had seen at the Protestant stations. He writes in this connection:

"On our arrival at St. Ann, we proceeded to the mission house, where we met with a most cordial reception. Had the pleasure of dining with Pères Lacome and Le Frain at the Roman Catholic mission house—agreeable men and perfect gentlemen. What an advantage Rome has in this respect—Protestants constantly send vulgar, underbred folk to supply their missions: Rome sends polished, highly educated gentlemen. Then how much the best is her mode of addressing the Indian mind; for example, every Indian who joins the Mission Temperance Society is given a handsome silver medal³ to wear. This appeals to his pride or vanity, and is far more effectual than mere dry exhortations.

"On the pressing invitation of my hosts, I remained for the night at the mission house. Everything there is wonderfully neat and flourishing, it is a true oasis in the desert. The cows fat and fine, the horses the same, the dogs, the very cats the same. A well-arranged and well-kept garden, gay with many flowers, some of them the commonest flowers of the woods and plains, brought to perfection by care and labour. The house beautifully clean; the meals served up as in a gentleman's dining-room."⁴

The noble traveller then goes on to explain that the *pièce de résistance* of those meals consisted of

³The earl's text reads "model," an evident misprint.

⁴"Saskatchewan and the Rocky Mountains," pp. 167, 168.

wild fruit, which he must have so much the more appreciated as his own itinerary forced him to rely on the canned luxuries which the missionaries could not afford. Had he stayed any length of time, or arrived at any other season than that of the wild berries, he would not have been long without perceiving their penury, though theirs was by far the most prosperous of all the northwestern missions, owing to its situation within the wheat growing and stock raising region.

The extent of the poverty common to all the northern posts was truly amazing. Even flour was then, and remained for many years afterwards, a veritable luxury in the north, many missionaries passing several years without tasting bread. If we consider that most of these hailed from France, where the daily diet is based on bread incomparably more than it is in America, we will better realize the intensity of their privations.

As a rule, two sacks of flour were sent yearly to each mission, one of which was for the priests themselves, and the other for their *engagé* and his family. Nor should we forget that the missionaries were generally two, sometimes three, in a place. A few bags of pemmican, tough, stale and rancid from age, were added to this, and the fathers, in spite of their bodily exertions while building up their homes or appurtenances and toiling during their travels over several feet of snow, had to rely on the denizens of the lakes for their staple food.

This was fish, annually caught in large quantities for themselves and their sleigh dogs. After having been cut open, and spread out by means of wooden spits, this was left to dry hanging from poles laid on scaffoldings. As a result of this treatment, it lost all the flavour it might have originally possessed, when, in course of time, the stench it emitted and the "animation" of which it became the theatre did not render it absolutely repulsive to anything but a famishing stomach. Famine was indeed a familiar experience with all the missionaries in the north, who usually made light of it, and replaced a missed meal by tightening their belts, as they would good-humouredly put it.

If therefore we add these privations to the fatigues and discomfort of long voyages on foot, or, worse than all, on snowshoes (the inexpressible agony of which one must experience to properly appreciate it), we will understand why a publicist felt warranted in writing that "it is well known among all the religious Orders that the missions of Athabasca-Mackenzie are the most difficult and painful in the whole world, without excepting those of China, Corea and Japan."⁵ The appropriateness of this assertion will become so much the more evident if we take into consideration the excessive severity of a climate which, in places, gives nine months of the year to a most rigorous winter.

Such were the sweets for which were longing the

⁵Judge Prendergast, in *Le Manitoba* newspaper, 28th June, 1894.



BISHOP GRANDIN, O.M.I.,
The Year of his Consecration.

members of a caravan which, on July 9, 1860, appeared in sight of the humble village of St. Norbert. It was led by Mgr. Grandin, who had been unable to return earlier on account of a serious illness due to the impression made on his sensitive nature by his consecration and consequent responsibilities. With him were Fathers Séguin, Caer and Gasté; Brother Boisramé; Mr. Oram, the Montreal convert whom we have already mentioned; three Grey Nuns, and their two lay assistants.

Bishop Taché had gone up to meet them, and they rested till the morrow with Father Lestanc, the parish priest of the locality. Another member of the missionary party, the scholastic Brother Grouard,⁶ was left at Quebec to complete his studies. Among the foregoing priests, one, Rev. Alphonse Gasté, belonged likewise to the secular clergy. He was stationed at St. Norbert to take the place vacated by the novice Father Gascon.

Bishop Grandin was no sooner in St. Boniface than he again fell sick. Yet, after twenty days of patient suffering, though he was no better, he insisted on being allowed to return to his northern mission. Despite all protestations, he was actually carried from his bed to the vehicle that was to take him to the point where he was to embark for Ile à la Crosse. The episode of the bogus Son of God had

⁶Afterwards Vicar-Apostolic of Athabasca. It may be worth remarking that most of the northern bishops, Taché, Faraud, Clut, Pascal and Grouard, reached America before they had been ordained priests.

made a deep impression on his mind: he had the good of that mission so much at heart that he longed to see the denouement of that escapade.

With him left Father Séguin, Bro. Boisramé and three Sisters of Charity. The party reached destination, October 4, 1860. It is therefore to that date that we must ascribe the foundation of the Ile à la Crosse convent. The names of the foundresses are likewise worth recording: they were Sisters Agnes, Pépin and Boucher. Their voyage had been exceptionally unpleasant, and the sixty-seven days it lasted from St. Boniface were a series of accidents, mishaps and hardships of all kinds.

Yet these difficulties had at least one good result: they entirely cured Mgr. Grandin.

The year 1860 was indeed a period of foundations. In addition to the convents already established at St. François-Xavier, St. Norbert, Ste. Anne and Ile à la Crosse, a more modest institution of a similar character was started on September 20, 1860, at a place six miles up the Red River (from St. Boniface), where for a long time a group of half-breed settlers had been in existence.⁷ As that locality had no resident priest, Bishop Taché attended himself to the religious wants of the sisters, driving thither every morning to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice

⁷The first sisters of St. Vital were Sisters L'Espérance, D'Youville and Connolly, the latter being the halfbreed daughter of Wm. C. Connolly, the superintendent of New Caledonia, now northern British Columbia, and a sister of Lady Douglas, the wife of the first Governor of British Columbia.

for their benefit. Such were the beginnings of St. Vital, a settlement the Bishop of St. Boniface named after the patron saint of his coadjutor.

To compensate for the joy consequent on so many accessions to the ranks of the missionaries, clerical and lay, Bishop Taché saw in the evening of July 27th, that is, while Mgr. Grandin was still with him, the three Christian Brothers depart for the east. Their superior was an old man, who, discouraged at the sight of ordinary difficulties, had obtained the recall of himself and companions. This constrained the bishop to put Father Lefloch at the head of the college, with Mr. Oram as professor of English.

Four days after the arrival at Ile à la Crosse of Mgr. Grandin's party, two other Oblates, Father Simonet and Brother Jean Glénat, were being welcomed at St. Boniface. The latter was destined expressly for the bishop's palace, so that his presence might lift from the prelate's shoulders those menial duties that he had so far found himself in the necessity of performing. His generosity had previously led him to part in favour of the missions with all the lay brothers sent him.

Brother Jean, as he was commonly called, did not find his new master at home. Bishop Taché had left for the missions of the Far West and Ile à la Crosse. At the last place he took everybody by surprise on October 30, 1860. His warm heart delighted in visiting his children of the frigid North, and he now wanted to devise with his coadjutor measures for

their spiritual welfare which the illness of the latter at St. Boniface had prevented him from considering.

Organization was now the order of the day, as the missionaries had to cope with the activities of the Protestant ministers and the ill-will of most of the northern traders. His representatives, on the other hand, were doing wonders in their respective fields of action. The Apostle of the Arctic Circle, Father Grollier, had visited St. Theresa's Mission, at Fort Norman, where he was startled to find that, previous to his arrival, cockle had been sown among the wheat. As the lonely priest had been expecting a confrère at Good Hope, he had somewhat tarried there, with the consequence that the large number of Indians who had congregated at Fort Norman expressly to see him met instead little Mr. Kirkby, the ex-schoolmaster, who told them that the French priest would not come, and that, after all, both religions were but two forms of the same. As a result, fifteen consented to be baptized by the minister, while all the others stoutly refused to be lured into accepting his services.

Father Grollier was too uncompromising a man to be liked by the Hudson's Bay Company traders. He was denied hospitality at Fort Norman; but the exhibition of the governor's letter opened doors to him that would otherwise have remained fast closed. He stayed there two months, and reinstated in the fold five of the fifteen Protestants made by Mr. Kirkby. Then he left for Fort Simpson, which he

reached in the middle of August, and repeated for the benefit of the Indians of that post what he had done for those of Fort Norman.

At the same time, Father Eynard visited the missionary station of Big Island (Sacred Heart of Mary), on Great Slave Lake (August, 1860). Then he set out for Fort Rae, while, conformably to his orders, his novice, Father Gascon, manning a small birch bark canoe, braved the rage of that inland sea, and, in spite of the cold and drenching rain, descended the Mackenzie as far as Fort Simpson, where he agreeably surprised Father Grollier.

The local Protestant missionary was just on the point of leaving for an excursion in the direction of Fort des Liards, on the Liard River. As Grollier had previously rendered some services to the *bourgeois* of the place, his confrère was allowed a passage to that western post on the Company's boat. Thus it was that Father Gascon reached destination (Fort des Liards) September 4, 1860, a few days before the minister, who arrived in time to assist at the plantation of a large cross, as a token of pre-occupancy by the Catholics. This post the missionary placed under the protection of the Archangel St. Raphael, the patron of travellers.

Meantime, Father Grollier was more and more on the way to fulfill the Psalmist's prophecy. This time he descended the Mackenzie to the fort on Peel River, where the northernmost of all the Déné tribes, the Loucheux, met the Eskimos, bent, as a rule, on

slaying as many of them as could be caught unawares. Filled with a holy zeal in presence of the new race, the missionary caused a solemn reconciliation between Loucheux and Eskimos by means of a significant ceremony, wherein the chiefs of both nations took part, on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14, 1860).

He did more. Yielding probably to the vehement impression made on his southern nature by the thought that he was now God's first representative to the inhabitants of the very end of the New World, he gave himself the consolation of regenerating in the waters of baptism some of the Eskimos he met, after which he returned to Good Hope in a small craft of whale-skin.

FATHER GROLLIER'S SIGNATURE.

Thus were the very first Eskimos baptized. In view of our present knowledge of that nation's character, it may not be irrelevant to ask ourselves whether the new Christians persevered in the faith of their baptism, and the practice of the duties into which their parents had been initiated.⁸

Even barring the land of the Eskimos, it was becoming evident that no bishop could effectively

⁸From a letter from Bishop Grandin we gather that he baptized only children.



RT. REV. BISHOP H. FARAUD, O.M.I.,
Vicar-Apostolic of Athabasca-Mackenzie.

direct from St. Boniface such distant posts as the missions of the Mackenzie, or even those of Great Slave Lake (St. Joseph and Big Island). Therefore, after a retreat preached at Ile à la Crosse by Mgr. Taché, in presence of his coadjutor and all the fathers, it was agreed between the two prelates that the Holy See should be prayed to erect into a separate vicariate under Father Faraud, raised to the episcopal dignity, the immense districts of Athabasca and Mackenzie. It was also decided that the mission of St. Peter, on Lake Caribou, should be revisited and, if possible, put on a basis of permanency. Father Végrevalle was named to that post, whither he proceeded October 28th, while Father Moulin was setting out (December 1st) on a visit to Fort Carlton.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BURNING OF THE CATHEDRAL.

1860-1861.

As to Bishop Taché himself, he made for the mission of Lac la Biche, which he reached after indescribable hardships due to the extraordinary lateness of the season, whereby the usual means of locomotion over frozen lakes and along snow trails were denied him. After a confirmation service he left, December 13, 1860, for his headquarters at St. Boniface.

A long tramp over the fresh snow gave him a foretaste of the fatigues that were in store for him. Yet, on the morrow, his companion woke him up at 1 A.M., as it was his intention to catch up with two men who had started before the bishop. Long and weary seemed the hours that prelate and lay brother trudged on through the frozen plains. At ten o'clock in the morning they had to halt for a slight refection and to rest the dogs that were hauling their baggage.

There was scarcely any wood; hence the bivouac fire seemed a mockery, and could not warm up the benumbed wayfarers. Tired out, sleepy, cold and famished, the poor prelate could not help allowing his thoughts to wander away to his home, some

fifteen hundred miles distant. There at least, he mused, he could have a decent fire and a couch to rest his bruised limbs. But on that very day and at the self-same hour, in that far-off St. Boniface for which he was yearning, the greatest disaster which ever overtook the Catholic missions of the Canadian Middle West was depriving him practically of all he possessed in the world!

Strange as this may seem, there was an intimate connection between that disaster and the old mission of Mr. Belcourt at Pembina.¹ Its new incumbent, a French priest named Joseph Goiffon, was returning from St. Paul when, wishing to get home sooner, he left his companions behind, and hurried to his mission. But, on November 3rd, he was assailed by a furious snowstorm, which, succeeding without transition to a rain which had drenched him to the bones, had for immediate effect to freeze stiff his clothing as he sat on his horse. It became intensely cold. Yet, in spite of the great inconvenience of his position, he rode on all day; but when he alighted, he could not stand up: both his feet were frozen.

He managed to dig a hole in the snow, where he passed four days and five nights without being able to stir, and destitute of fire or any other food than pieces of raw meat which he carved out of his horse, who had died by his side of cold and exposure. On

¹Rev. Mr. Belcourt had returned east in 1859, and received the charge, first of Rustico, P.E.I., then of Ste. Claire (Oct., 1865), in the County of Dorchester. He died at Shédiac, 31st May, 1874.

the 8th he was found by people who were going to the Red River Settlement. They caused him to be conveyed to Pembina, where he was charitably treated by an influential French halfbreed, named Joseph Rolette.

Three full weeks did he stay there, only to realize the extreme gravity of his case. The flesh, now in a state of putrefaction after a thorough thawing, fell off his feet, occasioning untold agony. Informed of his critical position, the Oblates of St. Boniface sent for him, and, on the 3rd of December, the surgeon cut off his right leg. The amputation of the left foot was to take place some time later, when the rupture of an artery caused a hemorrhage which utterly exhausted the strength of the patient. Just ten days after this operation, his life was despaired of by the doctors, and his death came to be hourly expected.

The poor missionary was himself resigned to his fate, while preparations for the impending funeral were being secretly made in the bishop's palace. December 14th, a nun was making candles with an assistant in the kitchen, when the dish that contained the liquid tallow was upset on the stove. The flames which immediately resulted could not be controlled, but set the palace afire, and such was the suddenness with which the conflagration spread, that it looked for a moment as if Mr. Goiffon was doomed to become its first victim. But two fathers had already rushed up to him, who saved the moribund

in spite of himself. He was going to die, he said; why not let him become the prey of the flames and save some valuables instead?

It was now bitterly cold, and, wonderful to relate, the original cause of all his troubles eventually became the poor priest's saviour. The cold stopped the hemorrhage, and Mr. Goiffon is hale and hearty at this very writing.²

But the worst remains to be told. From the palace the flames made a dash for the cathedral. This was in a short time writhing, as it were, and crackling under the sting of a merciless fire. Sister Gosselin, then in charge of the sacristy, made heroic efforts to save ornaments and sacred vessels; she was not altogether without success, but she nearly remained in the brazier herself.

In the evening of that fateful 14th of December, 1860, not a book remained of the library which the bishop had prized so highly; not a sheet of paper of his invaluable archives; not a pin of his wardrobe or of that of his priests. A few smoking walls alone told of the proportions of the vanished cathedral, that monument which was the pride of Red River, but gave no idea of its original magnificence or of the rich paintings with which one of the nuns had but lately decorated its ceiling. The two spires had tumbled down, and their sweet-toned bells,

²July, 1909.

The bells of the Roman Mission
 That call from their turrets twain
 To the boatman on the river,
 To the hunter on the plain,³

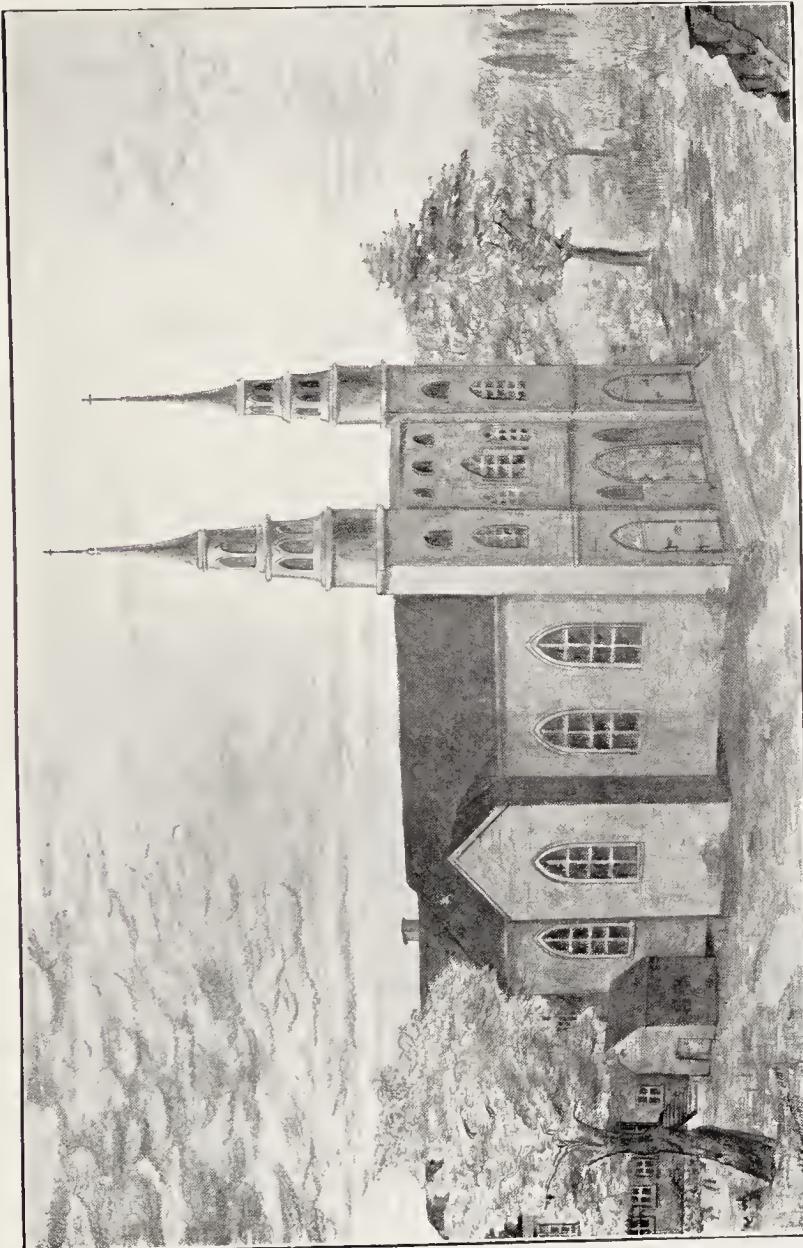
were now but a shapeless heap of metal on the ground. Nothing else remained of God's temple by the Red River but the memory of what it had been.

Such was the comfort left by the destructive element at the headquarters of the Catholic missions. Little did Bishop Taché dream of such desolation, as he yearned after home by the side of the ineffective fire smouldering at his far-off bivouac. He passed the first of January, 1861, with his brother Oblates of Ste. Anne, and there decided on the establishment of a new and better situated mission nine miles from Edmonton. Father Lacombe was given instructions to start it in the spring, and, on that account, it was placed under the protection of his patron saint. That locality has become famous under the name of St. Albert in the annals of the Church in Western Canada.

Then Bishop Taché returned to St. Boniface, and, on February 23rd, he was kneeling on the ashes of his cathedral, repeating the words of Job: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: as it

³"The Red River Voyageur," by Whittier. For that beautiful poem, see Appendix C.

By a strange confusion of localities, John Gilmary Shea has the following in the fourth volume of his "History of the Catholic Church in the United States," p. 650: "While the poor sufferer was lying in the Bishop's house at St. Paul, a fire broke out which reduced the church and residence to ashes."



THE CHURCH WITH THE "TURRETS TWAIN"

St. Boniface's Cathedral, with the Bishop's House in the rear.

hath pleased the Lord so be it done. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”⁴

The disaster that had bowed down the devoted head of the Catholic bishop did not deter him from continuing to fulfill his public duties, both at St. Boniface and at Fort Garry. Just before his journey to Ile à la Crosse, he caused the following motion to be carried in the Council of Assiniboia: “That neither the council, nor the different courts of Assiniboia be held on the following festival days: 1st, The Circumcision, 1st of January; 2nd, The Epiphany, 6th January; 3rd, The Annunciation, 25th March; 4th, The Ascension; 5th, Corpus Christi (the Thursday after Trinity Sunday); 6th, St. Peter and St. Paul, 29th June; 7th, All Saints, 1st November; 8th, The Immaculate Conception, 8th December; 9th, Christmas, 25th December.” Proposed by “the Lord Bishop of St. Boniface,” that motion was seconded by Salomon Hamelin, Esquire, and, being carried unanimously, it became one of the laws of the land.⁵ On his return from the same voyage, he called the attention of the same legislative body to the liquor evil, which was ever ready to spring up again. He moved that nobody be allowed to sell wine or beer without a license, obtained in the same way as former licenses for the sale of spirits. This proposal met likewise with unanimous approval in the council. The bishop would have furthermore had

⁴Job, i. 21.

⁵Minutes of the Council of Assiniboia, 27th Feb., 1860.

it decreed that no person be allowed to distill or manufacture spirituous liquor without a license for which £10 should be paid. But, for some unknown reason, he had to withdraw his motion to that effect.⁶

The Church of St. Boniface had been tried by fire: another element, water, was soon to make her tribulations identical with those of which the Psalmist sings when he says that "we have passed through fire and water."⁷ In the spring of 1861 an inundation which recalled those of 1826 and 1852 afflicted the whole settlement, and covered up the ruins of St. Boniface's cathedral.

Nor was this all. At the head of the Grey Nuns established by the Red River was a most deserving woman, Mother Valade, who may be considered as the foundress, meditately or immediately, of all the institutions belonging to their Institute in Western Canada. She had come in 1844, and had ever since directed with prudence and wisdom the sisters of St. Boniface under the high patronage of the bishop. She had been ailing for some time, suffering acute pains from an incurable malady. No cares could avert the fatal blow and she went to her reward, May 13, 1861.

Such was the desolation consequent on the action of the two destructive elements, that she was not vouchsafed a decent burial. Her remains were laid

⁶Ibid., 5th March, 1861.

⁷Psalm lxv., 2.

by the clergy wading in the water, in a temporary grave dug under the rubbish accumulated within the walls of the cathedral. The good mother was mourned by Catholics and Protestants, and the journal of the colony contained a most appreciative article on the work of her life.⁸

To make up in a way for those irreparable misfortunes, two oblations⁹ took place that winter and spring within the Canadian West: those of Father Gascon, on January 6, 1861, and of Father Gasté, in the beginning of June.

It were tedious to mention in detail the movements of the missionaries in the course of that year. After what we have already said of their activity and zeal in previous years, our silence on this point could not reasonably be construed as tantamount to an admission of idleness, or even of ordinary exertions, on their part. For instance, Father Gascon's excursion of five hundred miles on snowshoes, which permitted him to visit in succession the stations of Big Island, Fort Simpson and Fort des Liards, was but a specimen of the experiences common to all the evangelical labourers in the Far North.

⁸Mother Valade was born 27th Dec., 1808, at Ste. Anne des Plaines, in the diocese of Montreal, and received at baptism the surnames of Marie Louise. She was barely 17 years of age when she entered the novitiate of the Grey Nuns, and was admitted into their Institute on the 21st of Oct., 1828. Soon after, she was entrusted with the care of the finances of a large community, a circumstance which goes to show her fitness for the work of her life on the banks of the Red River.

⁹An oblation is the solemn pronouncing of the Oblate's vows of chastity, poverty, obedience and perseverance.

In the course of one of such periodical visitations, Father Tissot happened to pass by the mission of Ste. Anne. He improved his opportunity by teaching the halfbreeds and Indians of that place and vicinity the way to make lime, as he had already done at Lac la Biche and at Ile à la Crosse, a good evidence that the Catholic missionaries are men of progress in more senses than one. The reader will easily imagine the stupefaction of the natives when they saw the priest turn stones into flour, as they would have it in their language.

We have also to put to the credit of that year (1861) the foundation of St. Laurent's Mission, on the southern end of Lake Manitoba, which was in fact nothing but the resumption of Father Bermond's post of Our Lady of the Lake in a new site.

We have furthermore noted the first steps taken in the establishment of St. Albert, and just referred to the halfbreeds from the ranks of whom its first inhabitants were to be drawn. This new settlement already boasted some twenty houses the following year, as is attested by two English travellers, Lord Milton and Dr. W. B. Cheadle, who, in spite of their evident anti-Catholic animus, have a rather flattering reference to that mission in a book which, for readability, is surpassed by very few of its class. They call the place St. Alban's and, as usual with English visitors, Father Lacombe's name becomes Lacome under their pen. Here is what they have to say of him and his work:

"We found a little colony of some twenty houses, built on the rising ground near a small lake and river. A substantial wooden bridge spanned the latter, the only structure of the kind we had seen in the Hudson's Bay territory. The priest's house was a pretty white building, with garden around it, and adjoining it the chapel, school, and nunnery. The worthy father, M. Lacome, was standing in front of his dwelling as we came up, and we at once introduced ourselves. . . .

"Père Lacome was an exceedingly intelligent man, and we found his society very agreeable. Although a French Canadian, he spoke English very fluently, and his knowledge of the Cree language was acknowledged by the halfbreeds to be superior to their own. Gladly accepting his invitation to stay and dine, we followed him into the house, which contained only a single room with a sleeping loft above. The furniture consisted of a small table and a couple of rough chairs, and the walls were adorned with several coloured prints, amongst which were a portrait of His Holiness the Pope, another of the Bishop of Red River, and a picture representing some very substantial and stolid-looking angels. . . .

"He showed us several very respectable farms, with rich corn-fields, large bands of horses, and herds of fat cattle. He had devoted himself to the work of improving the condition of his flock, had brought out at great expense ploughs, and other farming implements for their use, and was at pres-

ent completing a corn-mill to be worked by horse power. He had built a chapel, and established schools for the halfbreed children. The substantial bridge we had crossed was the result of his exertions. Altogether this little settlement was the most flourishing community we had seen since leaving Red River, and it must be confessed that the Romish priests far excell their Protestant brethren in missionary enterprise and influence. They have established stations at Ile à la Crosse, St. Alban's, St. Ann's, and other places far out in the wilds, undeterred by danger or hardship, and gathering halfbreeds and Indians around them, have taught with considerable success the elements of civilization as well as of religion; while the latter remain inert, enjoying the ease and comfort of the Red River Settlement, or at most make an occasional summer's visit to some parts of the nearest posts."¹⁰

Here is indeed something to confound the detractors of the Catholic Church and missions, a testimony which shows once more how the Church looks after the material, as well as the spiritual, welfare of the people. In Western Canada, no less than in Mediæval Europe, she ever proved to be the civilizer *par excellence*.

The remarks of the English travellers are all the more valuable as certain passages of their book betray ignorance, bigotry, and glaring injustice. Take,

¹⁰"The Northwest Passage by Land," pp. 184-86. London, 1866.

for instance, the following which refers to the half-breeds of Western Canada:

“Being intensely superstitious, and firm believers in dreams, omens and warnings, they are apt disciples of the Romish Church, completely under the influence of the priests in most respects, and observing the outward forms of religion with great regularity, they are grossly immoral, often dishonest and generally not trustworthy.”¹¹

Commenting on these charges, Bishop Taché, in his masterpiece entitled *Esquisse sur le Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique*, makes the significant remark that he could “remind the joint authors of several circumstances well known to them which should have led them to remember that ‘gross immorality’ is not always on the side of the French or Canadian half-breeds.”¹² He then recalls the scriptural injunction: “Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thy own eye, and then shalt thou cast out the mote of thy brother’s eye,”¹³ and ends by declaring that, once they have embraced Christianity, the half-breeds can be classed among the really moral people.

Useless to remind the reader of the fact that Taché’s familiarity with this particular subject is incomparably superior to that of any other writer. Yet, as it is our practice to rely entirely on non-Catholic testimony, here is what we find in the report.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹²*Op. cit.*, 2nd ed., p. 82.

¹³Matt. vii. 5.

of S. J. Dawson, the civil engineer already mentioned: "In regard to the social condition of the settlement, crime is scarcely known.¹⁴ . . . During our residence in the settlement, and on our exploratory excursions I employed many of the half-breeds, and was thrown of necessity so much among them that I had good opportunities of observing their character, and it is much to their credit and that of their instructors, that I am able to say that I never once heard an oath or an indelicate expression made use of among them. This is different from what may be too often observed among the lower orders of other communities. . . . In travelling in the west, if I had the organization of a party, I would choose about an equal number of halfbreeds and French Canadian voyageurs."¹⁵

In a primitive society, where life is so free and so untrammelled by the restraints and conventions of our civilization, it may be safely asserted that people who will never use the least indelicate expression are not likely to be addicted to immoral habits.

As to the halfbreeds being dishonest, seldom has so patent a slander been published by a responsible party. Perfect honesty is, on the contrary, the very characteristic of the French halfbreeds, so much so indeed that it was the advent among them of strangers from Canada which forced them to resort to locks and keys, devices which had previously been

¹⁴The Catholic halfbreeds then formed the great majority of the half-caste population.

¹⁵*Op. cit.*, pp. 24, 25.

considered a useless luxury at Red River. Abundant Protestant testimony is available on this point; I choose the following because it is typical. Alexander Ross, no admirer of the French halfbreeds, mentions this instance of unmistakable honesty:

“Before reaching Pembina, on one occasion, a gentleman on his way to the States forgot, in his camping place, a tin box containing 580 sovereigns in gold, and in silver and bills the amount of £450 more. The following night, however, a halfbreed named Saint Matte happened to encamp on the same spot, picked up the box, followed the gentleman a day’s journey, and delivered box and contents into his hands to the utmost farthing, well knowing it was money. Considering their poverty, we might well speak of Saint Matte’s conduct in the highest strains of praise.”¹⁸

And the same author adds that “this might be taken as an index of the integrity of the whole body, generally speaking.” He also refers, on the following page, to the well-known policy of those people “to speak and act kindly towards each other,” a Christian disposition that can certainly not be put to the credit of their detractors.

We will not end our review of the events of 1861 without chronicling a second voyage of the Bishop of St. Boniface to Canada and Europe. Its object was to cause the plans ripened at Ile à la Crosse to be approved by the proper authority, as well as to

¹⁸“The Red River Settlement,” p. 250.

collect funds for rebuilding the burnt cathedral and episcopal residence. Taché left in June with Father Frain, whose health had been unsatisfactory since his arrival in the northwest.

Just at the same time, the new Oblate, Father Gasté, proceeded with Father Végreville and Bro. Perréard to Lake Caribou, northeast of Ile à la Crosse, where he finally established St. Peter's Mission, which for so many years was to be his home. A frigid home, indeed; for, in the opinion of Bishop Taché, this was the most difficult of all the missionary stations of the north, owing to the exceptional severity of the climate, which precludes the possibility of almost any kind of vegetation, and consequently entails privations unknown under more clement skies.

Finally, it was likewise in the beginning of June, 1861, that Bishop Grandin undertook a famous apostolic visitation of the northern missions which was to last upwards of three years. We shall now briefly entertain the reader with the most salient features of the travels and dangers consequent thereon.

CHAPTER XIX.

“IN JOURNEYING OFTEN.”

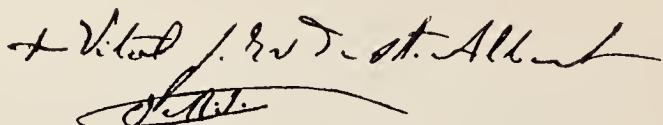
1861-1864.

Pope Pius IX. is reported to have called the Oblate missionaries of subarctic America the “Martyrs of Cold.” This designation, while picturesquely expressive and true, conveys to the mind but one of the colours that combine in making a faithful picture of the apostles of the frigid zone. A no less exalted personage, St. Paul himself, more completely depicts their life when he enumerates the hardships he had to undergo. For indeed the northern missionaries were like him “in journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils from false brethren, in labour and painfulness, in much watchings, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.”¹

To prove the appositeness of this description as applied to the obscure heroes of the north, and to give once for all an adequate idea of their work and environment, we will momentarily turn aside from the consideration of the various personalities in the Lord’s vineyard and concentrate our attention on the doings of their chief, the new Bishop of Satala, Mgr. Grandin. At the same time, we must remark

¹II. Cor. xi, 26, 27.

by way of qualification that the exalted station he occupied among his Oblate brethren naturally diminished his hardships in proportion to the respect shown him.

A handwritten signature in cursive ink, appearing to read "J. V. Grandin". Below the signature is a stylized initials "J. V. G." enclosed in a small oval.

BISHOP GRANDIN'S SIGNATURE.

Bent on visiting all the missionary posts of the north, in spite of the delicate state of his health, the young prelate left Ile à la Crosse June 2, 1861, accompanied by Brother Boisramé. He had just preached a fruitful mission crowned by a procession of the Blessed Sacrament, in the course of which was displayed all the pomp possible with the presence of two assistant priests. His means of locomotion was the Hudson's Bay Company's boat, wherein were piled up bales of furs, tenting and cooking impedimenta, boxes of all kinds, dogs and people of all nationalities. So frequent were the hindrances to progress, along the wild streams followed, that most of the time the bishop had to beat his way through the trailless woods, in order to facilitate the operations of the crew.

On the 6th the party was in sight of the Great Methy Portage, where Grandin passed two days and two nights preaching, confessing and confirming, while the local priest, Father Séguin, was teaching catechism and prayers. Then, accompanied by that

missionary, he walked across the portage under a pouring rain, and repeated at the other end the same ministerial work, after which he set out in a birch bark canoe that was bursted in shooting the rapids, to the peril of the bishop's life.

After four days' navigation, two of which were to the accompaniment of a drenching rain against which there was no protection, he reached the Mission of the Nativity, where he was grieved to find Father Faraud very ill, as a result of overwork and privations. For this reason and that which the reader already knows, the devoted missionary was ordered south. He had already laboured, sometimes day and night, twelve full years at Lake Athabasca. Father Clut was left to take his place.

Bishop Grandin stayed at the Nativity till July 1st. Shortly thereafter he found himself at the humble home of an old man who has become legendary among the missionaries of the great northland. This was François Beaulieu, the Patriarch of Salt River, the oldest of the French halfbreeds of the Far North, a relic of the heroic times of the discoverers and explorers, Alex. Mackenzie, John Franklin, J. Back and others. He must have been born about 1771, and was baptized in 1848 by Father Taché, after which he became a most exemplary Christian. In spite of his poverty, he built a house for the exclusive use of the priest that might happen to visit his little settlement. Father Gascon dwelt there some time, taking lessons in Chippewayan from him. The

place where the missionary said mass became sacred in the eyes of Beaulieu and family. They never inhabited it ever since, but filled it with holy pictures concealed from profane eyes by a curtain which was drawn aside on Sundays, Fridays and holidays, when an improvised service was held.

To the Indians of whom he had been elected chief, as well as to his own children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and their families, François Beaulieu was both priest and magistrate in the absence of either, and instances are on record when he filled that double rôle with the wisdom of a Solomon and the perspicacity of a theologian. Under the impulse of passion, a Christian had divorced his lawful wife and taken another. Thanks to the bishop's intervention, those unholy ties had been broken, and some time after the prelate's passage at Salt Lake, the Indian's legitimate consort was sent for. But her husband felt some scruples about taking her back without a new ceremony, which he deemed necessary. In his predicament he consulted Beaulieu, who at first was nonplussed as to what decision he should give. Then, after some moments of reflection, he delivered himself thus: "After all, if I lose what is mine, it is none the less my property even though I am not in possession of it. So it must be in the case of your wife. She is yours; take her. And to be the surer about it, we will say the beads together. That will take the place of all ceremonies."

In that little patriarchal settlement, the bishop as



FIRST MISSION HOUSE AT HAY RIVER.

usual heard numerous confessions, made four baptisms, blessed a cemetery, confirmed thirteen persons and gave holy communion to a large number, then went on to new conquests.

On the way, he met with forty-five Hudson's Bay Company men, in charge of the furs from the northern posts. He camped with them, and repeated for their benefit the ministrations by which previous parties had profited.

July 7th saw him at the Mission of St. Joseph, on Great Slave Lake, which he thus describes: "Their chapel is a room nine feet square built at the end of a hall 20 by 20, where the Indians assemble. So poor are the two fathers [Eynard and Gascon] that they cannot spare any paper to write to their superiors, and must make their baptism and marriage entries as short as possible." Many of the Indians that attended that post were absent hunting for a living, and the bishop regretted that he could not do as much for the tribe as he had wished.

On July 26th, he left for the other mission (Big Island, or Sacred Heart of Mary), on the same inland sea. His travelling was then much more comfortable than that of the missionaries he had just visited, who had often to cover distances varying from one hundred and sixty to three hundred and fifty miles on foot, loaded with their chapel and blankets. At Big Island, Bishop Grandin found himself with the Yellow-Knife Indians who were quite numerous and, as a rule, well disposed. His

work there was over by August 6th, when he embarked for the Mackenzie River.

In the near vicinity of a great rapid on that majestic stream, he took possession (August 6, 1861), in presence of the chief trader of the district, of a splendid site on which he was soon after to establish a mission dedicated to Divine Providence. This was in after years to become very important. It even saw a trading post rise up by its side.

Grandin had just received letters, some of which deeply affected his sensitive heart. One of them, couched in insulting language, was by a Protestant minister, who exulted over the invasion of the Papal States just consummated, boasted that the destruction of the Catholic establishment at Red River was an unmistakable token of Divine wrath, and predicted the early downfall of "Antichrist" (that is the Pope) and the complete overthrow of the Catholic missions in North America. Added to these insults came the news of the very serious illness of his Superior-General, Mgr. de Mazenod, who, at the time he read the letter that contained the information, had already succumbed (May 21, 1861). This was too much for the missionary bishop; he had never been strong; he now became quite sick. Yet, on the 10th of August he reached Fort Simpson, the capital of Protestantism in the north.

There he realized the blasting effects of heresy. So far the ministers had scarcely made any proselytes: their action had simply consisted in freezing

out the religious aspirations of the natives. Nevertheless even there God had His elects. Several cases of constancy in the faith, in the teeth of threats and offers of bribes, were brought to his notice. Mentioning the fact that he baptized five adults at that post, the bishop remarks in his journal: "True, this is little. Had I been a Protestant minister, I would have baptized several hundreds; but being a Catholic missionary, I strive above all to make Christians."²

August 20th he bade farewell to Fort Simpson and went up to Fort des Liards, in the vicinity of the Rocky Mountains. Father Gascon accompanied him in that trip. Omitting the incredible difficulties of an upstream course, we see him reach destination nine days after his departure. He was greeted by many cries of *marci* or "thank you" from native throats. Those Indians, though quite simple and primitive in their ways, had been somewhat spoiled by their contact with the preacher.

"What you say is true, and you seem to be the real minister of God, in the same way as the English preacher is the husband of a woman," remarked a chief. "But, you see, that preacher gives us tobacco and promises many fine things. If you were to do the same we would all pray with you."

Yet, finally all, with the exception of three that worked for the Company, preferred his teaching and were enrolled among his people, even without that incentive to "prayer," that is religion.

²*Missions*, vol. III., pp. 227, 228.

Thence Father Gascon set out for Fort Halkett, the rendezvous of the "Bad People," the name of a tribe which he found to be quite inappropriate. Other Déné bands, as wild and nomadic as ever existed under the sun, likewise profited by his ministrations.

In spite of the earliness of the season, winter was already making its appearance, and when the bishop left, September 12th, it had been snowing for three days. One day after his departure, he fell in with a band of Indians among whom he noticed the law of the sequestration of women after childbirth, common to all American aborigines, practiced with a revolting severity. He baptized the new-born, but nobody would dare approach the shelter where the mother had been relegated, for fear of the malign influences that were believed to emanate from her. When they set out to resume their incessant migrations, they would not allow a creature under such circumstances to use one of their canoes. They put a board over two which they joined as a raft, and the poor mother had to sit upon it, without touching the canoes, at the peril of her life. Direct contact with them would have portended grievous evil and rendered them unfit for service.

Bishop Grandin was hospitably received at Fort Simpson, where he stayed until the end of September. En route for Our Lady of Good Hope, he tasted all the sweets consequent on an early winter: the rivers were freezing, yet the ice was not strong

enough to be used by pedestrians, while overland the snow was too fresh to allow of comfortable snowshoeing—supposing that such a mode of locomotion can ever be comfortable. On the 6th of October the wind became uproarious and so cold that the party had perforce to call a halt on the way. They could not any more sleep at night than paddle by day-time, unprepared as they were for winter travelling. Three days later they were at the mission, where they met Father Grollier, who was slowly dying of asthma; Father Séguin, the hunter and purveyor of the place, and Brother Kearney, who was just plastering with mud the interstices between the logs that formed their cabin.

The bishop was profoundly affected at the sight of their destitution. Their house was a residence twenty-two feet by eighteen, which did duty for a church, a parlour, dining-room, dormitory and kitchen. "The beds do not take up much room," writes the good prelate. "They are our blankets which we spread out on the floor, and which we take up every morning. In a corner of the house is a rickety ladder of Father Séguin's own manufacture. It leads to the garret where are the coffers and provisions of the mission. The former consists in a few pieces of printed calico, several dozen of cotton handkerchiefs, and some yards of cloth. In the line of provisions there is some dried meat, and salt fish, twenty pounds of flour at most and as much of pem-

mican. This is carefully concealed as something very precious.³

The few pieces of woven fabrics above mentioned were used as money to pay the Indians for services rendered. Of course, window panes would have been entirely out of place in such humble lodgings. Yet, owing to the long darkness of the Arctic winters,⁴ Brother Kearney had introduced the luxury of a few parchment skins which served as windows. In the few weeks passed at Good Hope every member of the community had his appointed task. The bishop's was the putting up of firewood for the long winter months. He also employed his evenings in taking English lessons from the Irish brother.

Unfortunately for his zeal he could see only a few Indians. But he soon noticed that they formed an unpleasant contrast with those who had enjoyed for years the advantages of a Catholic mission. The soothing influence of our holy religion had as yet scarcely penetrated those rough natures, as was made but too clear by the conduct of several families who, in accordance with their ancestral custom, had abandoned on the way old or feeble men or women, who could no more follow the band, a proceeding which was well known to mean an early death from cold and starvation. The bishop inveighed against

³*Missions de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, vol. III., pp. 363, 364.

⁴Bishop Grandin writes, 15th Nov., 1861: "In less than fifteen days the sun will have disappeared from the horizon and I shall not see it any more at Good Hope, though I am not going to depart before some time in January" (*Missions*, vol. III., p. 364),

that cruel practice, and flattered himself that it would be given up, at least among those who valued the ministrations of the missionaries. He says in this connection: "We never have to deplore similar crimes in our more advanced missions."⁵

Another difficulty that confronted him was the lack of women for the young men, due to the practice but lately abolished of killing the little girls after birth.

He then expatiates in his journal on the extreme severity of the temperature, and mentions a party of five who arrived entirely disfigured, all having some part of their face frozen in spite of their precautions. He also regrets that he shall have to return without having come in contact with the Eskimos, whose characteristic vice he states to be an unconquerable propensity for thieving. He then relates that, as a Protestant minister was repairing, a year before, to the Yukon, he took away from the Catholic Indians he met their medals and crosses. But having later on fallen in with an Eskimo party, he was robbed of many of his travelling impedimenta, which those aborigines refused to return until he had given them in exchange the crosses and medals of which he had himself deprived the Catholics.

It was with the greatest difficulty that Bishop Grandin could find two men and three dogs for the sledge which was to contain his blankets and provisions for the journey to St. Theresa, or Fort Nor-

⁵*Missions*, vol. III., pp. 368, 369.

man. It was so very cold when he left on January 8, 1861! Fortunately the gentleman in charge of the fort generously came to his assistance. Here we have to acknowledge our inability to express in a few words the incredible sufferings and hardships of that voyage, which would take several pages to properly describe. To sleep in the open at forty-five to fifty degrees below zero, with two or three dogs crouching on one's person for the sake of the heat they emit, is scarcely episcopal. The prelate's costume by daytime was not more in accordance with the canons. He was dressed in long trousers of moose skin, a shirt of caribou skin with the hair inside, over which was a large blouse of moose leather. Two bags of bear skin hung from either shoulder: they were his mittens, in which he must constantly keep his hands under pain of seeing them freeze at once, while his head was covered with a skin hood passed over a fur cap.

Yet these precautions did not by any means ensure immunity from danger. One day, his companion, an Indian that preceded him on the way, having turned towards him to answer a question, suddenly seized the bishop's nose, squeezed it vigorously and pressed it in all directions, then rubbed it with snow, to the surprise of the missionary who wondered whether the cold had deprived the Indian of his reason. Soon enough he had to thank him for this apparent brusqueness: the episcopal nose was frozen, and the native's object in subjecting it to that massage was to restore circulation.

Omitting many other dangers and passing over the fatigues and unmentionable inconveniences inseparable from winter travelling in the subarctics, we arrive with our wayfarers at St. Theresa's Mission, January 21, 1862. The lodgings that await our arrival there are even more modest than those of Good Hope; but why tarry in a description of them? The poverty of the place did not prevent the bishop from remaining there till the 8th of March. He found only two Protestant Indians attending the fort, one of whom was a chief who had kept his two wives and for that reason preferred the "tolerance" of the Protestant clergyman to the rigidity of the priests.

Fasting and famishing was the order of the day for both pastor and flock. One of his men had cast off on the way from Good Hope an old pair of mocassins. A few days afterwards, an Indian family who had been a long time without eating, made a good meal on them. Worse still, an Indian killed and ate his four or five-year-old daughter who had been baptized by Father Grollier, and it was rumoured that many other parties were reduced to the same extremity.

Having departed from Fort Simpson in the company of three gentlemen, young and alert, the moral necessity the bishop was in of keeping pace with them resulted in his having his feet covered with blisters. On the third day, they were as if they had been soaking in mustard poultices. Then rheumatic

pains, with which he was quite familiar, returned, which rendered progress a veritable martyrdom for the poor missionary. To these trials ophthalmia, induced by snow-haze, added its torments, with the result that Grandin was in a state of absolute exhaustion when he entered Fort Simpson on the 17th of March.

However, two days later he had to set out again for Big Island, which he reached March 28th, for St. Joseph's Mission (April 3rd), and St. Michael's or Fort Rae (April 25th). More than once in that toilsome journeying had the poor missionary thrown himself down on the snow with the involuntary exclamation: "It's over; my course is run;" only to resume his painful trudging after some moments of rest on the cold couch provided by nature, a clear evidence, he remarks, that necessity renders man able to do a good deal more than seems at first possible.

Father Eynard had returned home just one day before the bishop's arrival. The priest was in even a worse plight than his bishop. Both his ears, his cheeks and nose were frozen. The reason of that pitiful state Grandin, in his humility, ascribes to a greater spirit of mortification, which prompted Eynard to abstain from food, in conformity with the penitential season (Lent), in spite of the many involuntary fasts all missionaries had to submit to while on the wing, or even at home.

Considering that the reader by this time must

have some idea of the life of the evangelical labourers in the great North, we might now resume our narrative of the events that transpired in north-western Canada since 1862. We shall, however, take the liberty of presenting him with an account of still another experience that fell to the lot of Bishop Grandin in the frozen wastes of the subarctics.

He was, in the summer of that year, saying his mass in the little chapel of the Nativity, Lake Athabasca, when two newcomers caused him an agreeable distraction by putting on surplices and serving him. They were Father Grouard, already mentioned, and another young priest, Father Emile Petitot, who was soon to distinguish himself by his geographical, ethnological and philological studies. In the winter of the following year, bishop and scientist were to meet again, but under very different circumstances.

It was on December 14, 1863; Mgr. Grandin was travelling on the ice of Great Slave Lake, closely preceded by some gentlemen connected with the Hudson's Bay Company. The party was not far from destination, that is, St. Joseph's Mission, when of a sudden squalls of wind made themselves felt which in a few moments acquired the proportion of a gale. At the same time, a fine snow which was falling whipped the faces of the wayfarers, and soon concealed everything from view. It was the same story over again: one of those terrible snowstorms which spell death to the unwary traveller on a plain or a large sheet of water. In spite of the snow that

obscured the sky, the ice was left quite bare by the impetuosity of the wind that swept it off, so that the bishop and his guide, a child thirteen years old, could not distinguish the tracks of their companions, and completely lost their bearings. The Indian guide of the Hudson's Bay Company men, who knew that the bishop was doomed if left alone, vainly asked them to wait for him; the bitter cold and their inexperience with northern blizzards led them to pay no heed to his remonstrances.

Bishop and child were now roving at random, simply with the object of keeping themselves from freezing. Both were soon exhausted. Tired out, stiff with cold and cut by the piercing wind they knew the consequences of inaction in the midst of such a storm; but endurance has its limits, and these were now reached by the hapless wanderers. Lying down to the leeward of his sledge while pressing the child to his bosom, the bishop made the sacrifice of his life and begged for God's mercy on both. Then, in spite of the numerous acts of contrition they had already made, he heard the confession of little Baptiste, while the child was weeping in spite of himself, and the dogs were howling under the sting of the bitter cold.

Humanly speaking, they were doomed; once asleep they would not awake, except to appear before God's tribunal. The bishop did his best to prevent the child from falling asleep, notwithstanding his own drowsiness due to fatigue and the continual whine

of the wind. The terrible situation of the little party is more easily understood than described; yet with God's special protection, both saw the light of the morrow. Early in the morning they were rescued by a party sent from the mission and the fort, and Bishop Grandin entered the chapel of the former as Father Petitot was saying mass for him, wondering whether it was not a requiem mass that he ought to celebrate.

We have mentioned the important post of Providence at Grand Rapid, on the Mackenzie. Father Gascon left, July 4, 1862, with Brother Boisramé and two Chippewayans, to go and make the very first start on its establishment. The pioneers were assailed by swarms of mosquitoes which rendered their work exceedingly painful, as if the devil, apprehending the good of which that mission was to be the instrument, had sent that additional obstacle. On the 12th Bishop Grandin arrived and his companion, Father Petitot, took Father Gascon's place as axeman and carpenter.

To return to less primitive quarters. We have noticed the departure of the Bishop of St. Boniface for Europe. The twofold object of his journey was attained. A special appeal to the eastern Canadian Catholics by their respective pastors brought in the handsome offering of £1200 for the reconstruction of his cathedral and residence; the division of his immense diocese and the consequent nomination of Father Faraud were ratified. On May 13, 1862, that

missionary became Bishop of Anemour and Vicar-Apostolic of Athabasca-Mackenzie. His consecration took place on November 30th of the same year at the hands of Archbishop Guibert, of Tours, France, the oldest of the Oblate prelates; but he spent some time preaching and lecturing with a view to gather funds for his missions, probably the most destitute in the world. Moreover, an excellent missionary was given Mgr. Taché in the person of Father André; two sisters were also sent him, who were accompanied by devoted women destined to assist them without remuneration.

Another recruit to be credited to the same voyage was the Rev. Mr. Joseph N. Ritchot, who soon took the place at St. Norbert of Father Mestre, whose alarming state of health brought about his return to France, where he died shortly after. Mr. Ritchot was the precursor of a new series of parish priests who helped Bishop Taché in making Catholic Manitoba what it is, and whose persevering efforts could not be too much praised.

Rev. Joseph Noël Ritchot was born at L'Assumption, on December 25, 1825. He commenced his studies for the priesthood when already twenty years of age and was not ordained before he was thirty, that is, on December 22, 1855. He was parish priest of Ste. Agathe des Monts when, in May, 1862, the Bishop of St. Boniface persuaded him to leave for the west.

Another sign of progress was the departure from

St. Boniface, July 8, 1862, of Father Maisonneuve with three nuns, named respectively Gunette, Damais and Tisseur, for the mission of Lac la Biche, of which the ladies were to found the first convent, while an Oblate brother was establishing an English school at Edmonton.

The sisters reached destination August 26, 1862. In the Far North a new worker was emulating Father Grollier and doing wonders of zeal and self-abnegation, too often with but indifferent success. A Protestant minister, Mr. Kirkby, had just (spring of 1862) crossed the Rocky Mountains into the Yukon Territory. Father Séguin tried to neutralize his action on the Loucheux Indians of Peel River and the western slope of the Rockies. But the struggle was very unequal; the English clergyman had resources which Séguin did not possess, and of which he would not have made use had they been at his command. Now the Loucheux were exceedingly fond of tobacco; they likewise appreciated the value of good English tea, and did not spurn the pieces of wearing apparel offered them by the preacher of the "pure Gospel." At Peel River they had already seen Father Grollier and taken kindly to the Catholic teachings and ministrations. Nevertheless they thought nothing of assisting at the minister's distributions of tobacco, a circumstance which gave him the momentary illusion of conversions *en masse*. When told that, after accepting his bounties, they had practically all gone to

enjoy them with the Catholic missionary, Kirkby was indignant and left for La Pierre House, on the west side of the northern Rockies, where he thought himself, with some appearance of reason, sure of all the Indians who knew him already and had never seen a Catholic priest. But Séguin followed him there, arriving with him at that trading post on June 17, 1862.

Both preachers and traders endeavoured to ostracize Father Séguin who, at first, had quite a number of Indians at his service, but saw their ranks gradually thin out in proportion as both his opponents were generous with those that listened to the Englishman. The head trader went so far as to threaten never to give or sell any tobacco to such as would continue to show their preferences for Catholicism. As to the preacher, he stooped to the grossest calumnies against the priests and even against the saintly Bishop Grandin.⁶ The practical result was that the Loucheux realized the divine mission of the Catholic missionaries, but as a rule had not the courage to refuse the bounties of the Protestant clergyman and trader.

From La Pierre House Father Séguin returned to Good Hope, which he did not reach before having experienced untold hardships and mishaps through the Rocky Mountains. Yet the poor father was no sooner home again (August 2nd) than he received

⁶He did not blush to say that Father Grollier (who was then preparing for death) had a wife, that Séguin had several, and that Bishop Grandin was no better (*Missions*, vol. V., p. 250).

a letter from Mgr. Grandin who ordered him to Fort Yukon itself, where Kirkby had already spread his usual calumnies against the priests in the course of two visits. A new Anglican minister, a halfbreed by the name of Robert Maedonald, was repairing thither, and, being a single man, he was thought more dangerous than his married colleague.

Séguin reached Fort Yukon on September 23, 1862, and as the head of the post (which the Russians claimed was on their territory) was so far away from the headquarters of the Mackenzie district, the poor missionary was treated with very scant courtesy. He soon perceived that Kirkby's preaching and slandering had not been in vain. Moreover, a French Canadian halfbreed, who had turned Protestant because of the reproof he knew was merited at the hands of the Catholic priests for his most scandalous conduct,⁷ used all his influence with his relations and others among the natives to keep the Loucheux away from the priest.

Yet Father Séguin had to pass the winter in the enemy's camp, a winter unhallowed by any spiritual consolations. He set out for his return east on June 3, 1863, and, after thirty-five days of extremely painful travelling through mountain gorges, across torrents whose icy waters he had constantly to ford, sometimes at the risk of his life, he reached Good Hope on July 14th. His eleven months of isolation had been all the more felt as their bitterness had not been tempered by the least success.

⁷He was openly living in the state of bigamy.

CHAPTER XX.

ONE MORE BISHOP.

1864-1866.

Things were brighter at Red River. On his return to St. Boniface, Bishop Taché set upon building up again what fire had destroyed. He commenced by the erection of a stone vestry forty by thirty, which at first did duty as a church. It was occupied on All Saints' Day, 1862. On November 4th the remains of Mgr. Provencher, which were found well preserved, were, after a solemn requiem service, deposited in a vault prepared on the site of the new cathedral.

The very first work on this was done in the winter of 1862-63, when Mr. Thibault with his halfbreeds of St. François-Xavier cut and sawed in the vicinity of Ste. Anne des Chênes the lumber destined for the framework of the roof. The masonry work was commenced in the spring of 1863 and was actively pursued till the following fall, when the bare walls, ceiling and roofing were finished. The new edifice was smaller than the one it replaced, and those who had seen the generous proportions and, for the country, magnificence of the former cathedral could not help imitating the ancients of Israel in their regrets, when they compared the new temple with the old. These regrets were intensified by the sight of the



NORTHERN DÉNÉ BOYS.

unfinished state in which the new building had to be left for a long time, owing to the lack of funds.

In the beginning of 1864, the foundations of the new episcopal residence were laid, and in April of the following year the "palace" was inhabited by a large number of Oblates.

One who could not profit by Bishop Taché's hospitality, but had gone to dwell in a much more splendid palace, was the intrepid Father Grollier, the Apostle of the Arctic Circle. Ever since 1861 that pioneer had been suffering agonies due to asthma and his inability to counteract on the spot Protestant proselytism. When, in 1862, his indomitable energy took him from Good Hope to Fort Norman, his progress had been that of an invalid scarcely able to walk a few hundred yards without being out of breath. For two years longer he dragged on a miserable existence, unwilling to leave his neophytes for the south, whither his superiors suggested he should go, and teaching them by word and deed practically to his very last day. Reclining on a buffalo robe spread on the floor of his humble cabin, he was asked whether anything could be done to alleviate his sufferings or help him out in any way; to which he had answered that he thought a little milk and a potato might do him some good. But neither milk nor potatoes were to be had; no doctor or remedy of any kind was available in the poor northern mission, and on June 4, 1864, Grollier expired, contented in spite of his penury, and fortified

by the sacraments of Holy Church, after having given directions that his remains be deposited between the last two Indians buried in his cemetery.

He was in the prime of life, barely thirty-eight years of age, and was the very first priest to die of a natural death within the immense territory falling within the scope of his work.¹

The great event of 1864 for the diocese of St. Boniface was the canonical visitation of the Oblate missions by Father Vandenberghe. That gentleman had been sent by the Right Rev. Father Fabre, the new Superior-General of the Order, and arrived at Red River May 22nd. He was agreeably surprised to see the honourable position the Church occupied there in the estimation of all classes. On June 4th he took passage on one of the Hudson's Bay Company's boats bound for Methy Portage, where he was met by Bishop Grandin, who had just completed his three years' voyage of inspection of which we have presented the first part to the reader. It was some time afterwards that the young prelate re-

¹Rev. Pierre Henri Grollier was born at Montpellier, in the south of France, 30th March, 1826. He was studying philosophy when he resolved to enter the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and pronounced his vows on the 12th of Oct., 1848. He was ordained priest by Bishop de Mazenod 29th June, 1851. We have already remarked that his great zeal on behalf of Catholic interests made him *persona non grata* to many of the traders. That there were honourable exceptions is shown by the following passage of a letter addressed by one of them to Bishop Grandin (14th Jan., 1865): "I have learned with sincere regret of the premature death of Rev. Father Grollier. Whatever may have been his relations with others, I must confess that I have always found him a pleasant companion, full of zeal for the accomplishment of his duties, and a firm advocate of the Company's interests among the Indians."

ceived from one of the most prominent among the northern officers of the Company a letter which so visibly reflects the impression made on fair-minded Protestants by the devotedness of the missionary that we feel it our duty to reproduce it here almost in its entirety. Though the writer of that communication must have obtained only glimpses of Grandin's exertions in the north, that document will amply suffice to convince the reader that our own sketch of his labours and hardships is far from overdrawn.

"The reception of your esteemed letter of July 24th ult., did not cause me more satisfaction than the news of your happy return after a long residence in the north, where, as I saw it with my own eyes, you gloriously followed in the wake of your illustrious prototype St. Paul, working with your own hands and preaching faithfully, in season and out of season, the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the heathen. The noble abnegation, the calm, the admirable energy with which you underwent hardships, overcame obstacles and endured sufferings of an exceptional nature are beyond all praise. For my own part, though I have passed some fifteen years in those wild regions, though I saw and experienced personally several of the vicissitudes of life in the Far North, I should shrink from sufferings and privations so prolonged, so many and so continuous as Your Lordship endured on the banks of the Mackenzie. If your far-away friends had seen you as I did, in a *palace* made of shapeless logs super-

posed on one another, to the height of seven feet, lighted only by coarse pieces of parchment doing duty for window panes; having nothing but the frozen ground for a floor, and for a door a few ill-joined boards which snow and wind penetrate every moment; for a bed a few pieces of wood on trestles; for staple food aliments which the least of the servants in beautiful France would have spurned to touch; your long and painful voyages, often in a state of semi-starvation; having for companions only savages who know nothing of the habits or feelings inspired by European civilization; surely those friends of yours would have shed tears of emotion at your unhappy fate. I know that your extraordinary patience and your unalterable courage have excited the admiration of all the officers of the district, without mentioning the affection and esteem which the personal qualities of Your Lordship have inspired to all classes of people along the Mackenzie River.''²

When in spite of religious animosities, Protestants were so enthusiastic in their praise of the work accomplished by the Catholic missionaries, it can easily be imagined that one of their own brethren, as was Father Vandenberghe, must not have been slow in appreciating the intensity of their zeal any more than the excellence of its results. From Methy Portage the visitor went to Ile à la Crosse where he was joined by Mgr. Taché. The prelate had taken

²14th July, 1865.

another route in order to inspect himself localities which Father Vandenberghe would not have time to visit. This plan, however, resulted in some delay, and the latter had been a month at Ile à la Crosse when the prelate reached there. With the visitor were six Oblates, namely two bishops, two priests, and two lay brothers.

After some more time spent at that mission, the representative of the Superior-General visited in succession Cold Lake, Lac la Biche, St. Albert, Edmonton and Fort Carlton, returning to St. Boniface by way of Duck Bay, where he was met by Father Simonet, of St. Laurent, the new mission on the south end of Lake Manitoba, which replaced Notre Dame du Lac and the earlier Duck Bay post of Mr. Darveau. At the latter place the bishop confirmed twenty-two persons, a circumstance that goes to show that the persevering efforts of the new missionaries had at last obtained tangible results among the naturally obdurate Sauteux.³

The prelate and the Oblate official reached St. Boniface together on February 23, 1865. They were greeted by the sweet notes of three bells which had arrived for the cathedral during the visitor's journey of over eight months. That gentleman found Father Lestanc at the head of the Oblates of St. Boniface and acting as administrator of the diocese during the absence of its Ordinary, while Father Végreille had been the director of the college.

³It must, however, be remarked that several of those Christians were French-Sauteux halfbreeds.

Father Vandenberghe no sooner finished his work after the visitation of two missions on the American side of the frontier, than Bishop Faraud was received (May 24, 1865) at St. Boniface, with his caravan of prospective missionaries comprising Fathers Genin, Tissier and Leduc, with Brothers Lalican, Hand and Mooney. After three weeks passed in the intimacy of Bishop Taché and brother Oblates at the episcopal residence, Mgr. Faraud left, June 13th, with Father Genin and Brother Boisramé, who had been recruiting his health shattered by overwork in the Far North. The prelate reached Ile à la Crosse on July 25th, and was delighted to meet Bishop Grandin, who had done so much for the Indians of the territory that was now Mgr. Faraud's vicariate-apostolic.

The height of land which formed the famous Methy Portage was the dividing line between the diocese of St. Boniface, of which Mgr. of Satala remained the coadjutor bishop, and the new domains of Mgr. Faraud. There the latter received the abjuration of a young Scotchman, and on August 15th he passed a few hours with Father Clut at his old mission of the Nativity (Lake Athabasca).

But henceforth his residence must be farther north, at the Providence Mission lately established by Bishop Grandin. On, therefore, he went visiting Fathers Eynard and Gascon at St. Joseph's, Great Slave Lake, as he made for his new headquarters, where he was welcomed, August 23rd, by

Father Grouard and Brother Alexis. Still, most important business urges him on. By order of the Holy See he must visit the remotest of his posts and take, as it were, a sort of plebiscite on a question dear to his heart.

Bishop Faraud had scarcely been consecrated when the thought of his ever recurring infirmities—acute rheumatic pains—filled him with misgivings as to his ability to discharge unaided the duties of his new station. The increasing activity of Protestantism in the north rendered that inability to cope with all the difficulties even more apparent. A consultation with his Superior-General at Paris resulted in a name being chosen for the approbation of Rome, which was formally begged to grant the new vicar-apostolic a coadjutor. Pius IX. had graciously ordered that bulls be prepared in compliance with those prayers; but the favour had been conceded subject to a condition which is as unusual under the circumstances as it is uncommon for Rome to give an auxiliary to a bishop who has not even entered on the exercise of his functions. This was that all the priests under Bishop Faraud must be consulted, and give their assent to that measure before it could be consummated.

And so on went the consulting prelate. After two days of downstream navigation he landed at Fort Simpson, where he concluded the exercises of a retreat to numerous Indians. September 2nd saw him again on the waters of the gigantic Mackenzie, and

five days later he was kneeling in the chapel of Our Lady of Good Hope.

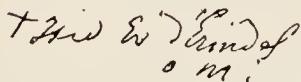
There Fathers Séguin and Petitot, with Brother Kearney and a large number of Indians, greeted their new Ordinary. After a visit to the grave of Father Grollier, the prelate was much gratified to learn that, since the demise of the devoted missionary, the Hare Indians realizing how good he had been to them, had experienced a change of heart that bode well for the future of the mission. They had previously been rather remiss in conforming their conduct to his teachings; but now it could literally be said of him as of Abel of old that "he being dead yet he speaketh."⁴

On September 14, 1865, the itinerant prelate left the tomb of the martyr to duty and set out again for Providence. His progress was now slow, not only because he had to ascend the river, but owing also to sickness which prostrated his crew. Left to themselves the bishop and Brother Boisramé had to do all the work, in addition to nursing the sick. They took a wrong direction, thereby uselessly prolonging their course. On October 5th, they were at Fort Simpson after twenty-three days of terrible exertions and anxieties, and, on the 13th of the same month, they reached their destination, Providence Mission.

It was there, in the newest missionary station of the Far North, that an event was to take place which

⁴Heb. xi. 4.

was fraught with momentous consequences for the missions of the new vicariate-apostolic. With one exception all the priests had been consulted on the expediency of granting a coadjutor to Bishop Faraud, and without a single dissentient voice, they had concurred in the necessity of the proposed step. The one exception was the appointee to the position himself, that is Rev. Father Clut. That missionary had scarcely had time to see his new bishop, who had passed but one hour at Lake Athabasca. Yet the interests of his mission demanded a full consultation with him. Hence, December 12th, Father Clut got his sledge and dogs in readiness, donned his snow-shoes and off he was, accompanied by a single Indian, a half-blind invalid. He pressed on and on, pausing at St. Joseph's for the Christmas festivities, and, after a march of thirty-eight or forty days in a temperature 40° to 50° below zero, he reached Providence with Father Eynard, who had accompanied him from St. Joseph's.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "T. Clut" followed by a date.

BISHOP CLUT'S SIGNATURE.

There were now eight Oblates at that mission; in presence of all Mgr. Faraud proclaimed; January 3, 1866, Clut's nomination as Bishop of Erindel *in partibus infidelium* and coadjutor to the Vicar-Apostolic of Athabasca-Mackenzie.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONFLICTS AND DANGERS.

1866-1868.

Meantime the Indians among whom Mgr. Clut was to exercise his new functions were decimated by scarlet fever and the missionaries had become both doctors and nurses to their stricken flocks. In spite of their efforts to save the sick fully forty-five died in a short time at Fort Simpson and perhaps more in the near vicinity.

That post was more than ever the battleground for the two hostile camps, the Catholic faith on the one hand and the schism of Henry VIII., with its ever changing doctrines, on the other. Little by little the former was losing ground owing to the fact that its accredited representatives could not establish themselves permanently there, while the Protestant clergyman, with the open connivance of the traders, high and low, no less than by means of the gifts which English generosity allowed him to lavish on the proselytes, was destroying during over eleven months of the year what the priests had done during the few days of their visit to the post.

Between the two conflicting creeds too many of the natives, though naturally religious, remained hesitating and almost skeptical. They kept on their

old ways of cannibalism in times of distress, and continued to abandon to certain death the old and infirm when travelling. The officers of the powerful corporation that enjoyed a practically undisputed monopoly over the fur trade in the north generally showed themselves polite and even hospitable to the Catholic missionary; but what could the poor half-starved Indians do when, after the departure of their spiritual guides, they were faced with the prospect of seeing the traders show them the cold shoulder unless they abandoned the priest for the preacher? When alone with the former they strenuously protested that in him only did they believe; but in several cases this faith was not strong enough to render them proof against the allurements held out by the champions of heresy. Let us hasten to add, however, that within the valley of the Mackenzie the great majority of the Indians remained faithful to the "men of God," the "true Praying Ones," in preference to the "husbands of women," as they termed the ministers.

And no wonder, for just then the Catholic missionaries were vieing with one another in zeal for the good cause. Father Grollier's place was advantageously taken by Fathers Séguin and Petitot who, having already mastered the language of their people, were constantly on the move looking for the lost sheep. The voyages and missionary experiences of the latter were afterwards to form five or six volumes, which we must with regret deny ourselves the

pleasure of even analyzing. In one of his journeys, made by the end of 1865, he was snowshoeing for over six consecutive weeks, and he traversed on the ice not less than three hundred and thirty-six lakes of all dimensions, sixty-eight of which he crossed twice. He regenerated in the waters of baptism hundreds and hundreds of children, with quite a number of adults, mostly among the old and infirm.

The following year saw him hail with inexpressible satisfaction the frozen plains under which reposed, in its hibernal sleep, the inland sea known as the Great Bear Lake. This was on March 15, 1866, and he was the very first minister of religion to work on the shores of the hyperborean body of water. The establishment of Fort Norman, several times mentioned in this work, had been transferred thither from the valley of the Mackenzie, and with it the Mission of St. Theresa, which so far had been scarcely more than a name.

Unfortunately the satisfaction of evangelizing new Indians in hitherto unknown fields was, a month later, offset by the arrival of still another Anglican clergyman, the Rev. William Carpenter Bompas. This was the first educated minister to penetrate into the northern wilds with the intention of staying there—the others included ex-brewers, school teachers and catechists. Mr. Bompas proved no less active than the other representatives of Protestantism in the Far North and, being abler, he was soon recognized as an adversary to be reckoned with.

In view of the prominence to which he was to be brought by after events, it may not be uninteresting to quote the description Petitot gives of him in one of his letters: "He is endowed with an angelical mien, a celestial look, a voice that seems honeyed and cooing, and also an innate science. He reads the Bible in the Greek, and burns with an ardent zeal, being persuaded that he has received the special mission of withdrawing the poor Indians from the clutches of the priests. So far the natives do not mind him, because he has arrived without his baggage; but behold, he is to receive in a few months ten or twelve bales of goods and one box of remedies weighing 120 pounds. That, more than his Greek or his cloth, is likely to turn the heads of our redskins, if the Almighty or the Blessed Virgin do not help us."¹

As if to illustrate the truth of the Scriptural saying that "the life of man upon earth is a warfare"² the same difficulties which beset the missionaries in the Far North were confronting their brethren struggling for the true faith on the vast prairies of the Canadian West. Scarlet fever was there replaced by smallpox, and the aggressiveness of Protestantism was no less marked, though perhaps less successful, because it had for object Indians less amenable to views different from those of their own ancestors. There also the soldiers of the Cross were

¹*Missions*, vol. VII., p. 295.

²Job, vii. 1.

surpassing themselves in their efforts on behalf of the true faith. To mention but one, Father Lacombe reproduced on the plains the wonders of self-abnegation accomplished in the northern wastes by Father Petitot and others. In common with the latter, Lacombe had especially endeared himself to the roving hordes of Crees and Blackfeet by his assiduity in unravelling the mysteries of their so complex dialects.

The venerable Mr. Thibault, who was still in the diocese of St. Boniface, had written after an experience of several years among the prairie Crees: "When the last buffalo shall be dead, then we will be in a position to attempt something on behalf of the Plains Indians." Father Lacombe's zeal could not accommodate itself to such delay. He must make the children of unbridled liberty bow their proud heads under the yoke of Christ. He had received from the Rev. Father visitor (1865) the mission of following out those nomadic tribes wherever they went, and, difficult as it was, that mission was too much in accordance with his own wishes not to be gratefully accepted by the devoted priest.

From St. Albert, therefore, he set out for the boundless plains which, at this time, had nowhere been forced by artificial means into contributing towards the sustenance of man. He had already befriended many of the native chiefs; they received him with open arms, though they did not manifest such an enthusiasm for conforming their lives to his

teachings. He thus accompanied the Blood Indians to whom he taught prayers and hymns of his own composition. Then he joined himself to the Blackfeet proper, and very soon he could realize the dangers consequent on his mission.

For economic reasons a branch of that nation had divided itself into three groups respectively of forty-five, fifty and sixty tepees. The missionary was the guest of the smallest, and on the night of December 4, 1865, he was resting in the chief's lodge after a hard day's work, when *Natus* (the Sun) sprang up, gun in hand, and, in a particularly lugubrious tone, sang out:

“*Assinaw! Assinaw!* The Crees! The Crees!”

He had scarcely pronounced these words when a terrible detonation spread alarm and confusion in his camp, while bullets commenced to pierce every tepee, but more particularly the largest one where Lacombe was resting. The Blackfeet are brave Indians. The chief immediately rushed out of his home with his family and addressed his people exhorting them to sell their lives as dear as possible. The first volley had broken two of the supporting poles of his tepee, and the enemy must have been quite near, for, at the same time, the burning wad of two muskets had fallen at the feet of the missionary.

Father Lacombe got up, put on his cassock, kissed his Oblate crucifix and, making the sacrifice of his life, went out with his baptizing outfit to look for persons in need of his ministry. Right and left the

bullets whizzed in a night the darkness of which was relieved only by the flashes from the muskets; here and there the voices of the chiefs strove to rise above the din of the battle; men sang out their various war songs; the women bewailed their fate, and the children gave vent to their despair, while the horses neighed and the dogs howled through fear. Altogether it was a most terrible scene. The position of the party attacked was all the more critical, as most of their men had left two days before on a hunting expedition.

Vainly did the fearless missionary endeavour to attract the attention of the enemy, telling of his presence among the Blackfeet; he could not make himself heard. The first victim of the aggressors was a young woman who had received a bullet in the forehead. At her request the priest baptized her, and she died. A few minutes later a Cree scalped her, and slew her babe whom Lacombe had overlooked in the dark. The enemy captured twenty-five tepees with all their contents, including the priest's own belongings. An Assiniboine had just appropriated his breviary, when a Blackfoot laid him low with the contents of his gun. He was immediately scalped, while the missionary was recovering his own book.

Meanwhile the warriors of the other Blackfeet camps, warned of the affair by the fusillade, had come to the assistance of their friends. Yet the battle was not on that account discontinued, as the

aggressors were at least a thousand strong. Three times did they charge the apparently doomed camp, only to be repulsed with considerable loss.

What a long night it seemed to the poor missionary! Finally the dawn of the 5th of December was whitening the horizon when the priest donned his surplice and stole; then cross in hand, he advanced towards the enemy, cautioning at the same time the Blackfeet to cease firing. But fog and the smoke of the battle prevented the Crees from seeing him. Whereupon his friends, fearing for his safety, urged him to come back. Just then a bullet, striking the ground, ricochetted to his shoulder, and thence to his forehead, leaving half-stunned the unsuccessful truce-maker. The battle did not stop till ten in the morning, when a Blackfoot having succeeded in conveying the intelligence that the priest had been wounded, the Crees retired, protesting that they did not know of his presence among their foes.

Twelve Blackfeet had been killed, and fifteen wounded, three of whom could not recover, while at least two hundred horses had been captured or slain. On the side of the Crees ten men had lost their lives and fifty were wounded, several mortally.

Such were the charms of missionary work on the plains, at least when that work was not accomplished in the perfunctory way and with the safeguards proper to other parties.

Another danger which the same Father Lacombe had braved that very year was that of contagion. As

we have already mentioned, smallpox had broken out in 1865 among the Plains Indians, making twelve hundred victims among the Blackfeet alone. The missionary flew from camp to camp, and urged Crees and Blackfeet alike not to remain any longer deaf to the voice of God, who was punishing them for



FATHER LACOMBE'S SIGNATURE.

their obduracy. His efforts were not without results. But he almost succumbed himself to a violent dysentery he contracted among the Crees, and when he recovered his appetite after a period of fasting, he had nothing else to satisfy the cravings of nature than a soup made of straps of untanned leather and pulverized parchment.³

Yet the work of God was advancing apace, notwithstanding the obstacles that rose in its way. In the spring of 1866, the Rev. Mr. Ritchot, parish priest of St. Norbert, went to put up the first buildings of a mission which Mgr. Taché proposed to establish in a valley whose natural advantages he had long admired. This was the origin of the mission of Qu'Appelle, the material part of which was brought to completion by the same priest in the spring of the following year. In the summer of

³Letter from Bishop Grandin, *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*, XLI., p. 292.



REV. FATHER A. LACOMBE, O.M.I.

1868, Father Decorby, fresh from France, installed himself in the new residence, where the Oblates have ever since done successful work for the education, no less than the evangelization, of the natives.

From July to September, of 1866, Bishop Taché was absent in eastern Canada, where he secured the services of some more Grey Nuns, not to mention a new recruit to his clergy, the Rev. George Dugas, who reached St. Boniface, October 13, 1866, with the bishop and another priest, Rev. Joachim Albert Allard. Dugas was at once entrusted with the care of the college, and with the aid of Father Allard he soon instilled a new lease of vigour into that institution, resuming a classical course, which has never since been interrupted. Mr. Dugas remained in the ranks, as yet very thin, of the secular clergy; but Father Allard at once commenced his novitiate, and on November 4, 1867, was admitted into the Congregation of the Oblates.

Meantime God's servants were sorely tried at Ile à la Crosse, where Mgr. Grandin was residing in the rare moments left him after the visits of his missions. March 1, 1867, the entire establishment became the prey of the flames. All was lost in the conflagration. In spite of the bitter cold, not a blanket remained for either the fathers, the sisters, the old people under their care, or the orphans that were brought up by the nuns. Nothing was left to the grief-stricken missionaries and their devoted auxil-

iaries, not even a handkerchief wherewith to wipe away their tears.⁴

Farther north, an event of a very different character was, a few months later, rejoicing the heart of Mgr. Faraud: we refer to the consecration at Lake Athabasca of his coadjutor, Mgr. Clut. This took place on August 15, 1867, at the hands of the vicar-apostolic himself, assisted, by special permission, by Fathers Tissier and Eynard.

Another auspicious occurrence was the eleventh Chapter-General of the Oblates, at Autun, France. It lasted from August 5, 1867, to the 17th of the same month, with Bishops Taché and Grandin as members, and was one of the most important in the whole series of Oblate chapters. One of its results, as far as the missions of the Canadian West were concerned, was the further division of the diocese of St. Boniface, which was decreed by the General Administration of the Order and provisionally approved at Rome, which, however, left to an ulterior epoch the realization of the plan considered from a purely ecclesiastical standpoint. In virtue of that arrangement, Bishop Grandin was, shortly after the chapter, named by the General of the Oblates, Vicar of the Saskatchewan Missions, with jurisdiction distinct from that of Mgr. Taché in matters pertaining to the Oblates as religious or regular clergy.

⁴Letter from Mgr. Grandin, *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*, 4th Jan., 1868.

The new vicariate of missions⁵ comprised the basins of the Saskatchewan and of English River, with the valley of the Athabasca, as far as Lesser Slave Lake inclusively. It counted within its territory the missions, first of St. John the Baptist (Ile à la Crosse), where resided two priests with three lay brothers and as many Grey nuns in charge of a school for girls and an orphanage for boys; second, St. Peter, on the northern shore of Lake Caribou, six hundred miles east of Ile à la Crosse, in the hands of two priests and one lay brother, with fourteen hundred Indians as parishioners; third, Ste. Anne on the lake of the same name, in the Far West, a mission which had seen better days, but was still the home of seven or eight hundred halfbreeds, very good Christians, as a rule; fourth, St. Albert, the seat of the new vicar of missions, which, since March 20, 1863, enjoyed the services of the three nuns who had commenced their labours at Ste. Anne. These sisters had schools for the children, and two priests, with a few brothers, had the direction of the establishment. Fifth, there was, moreover, Our Lady of Victories, at Lac la Biche, with two fathers and three sisters. Lastly there was a sixth post established by Father Lacombe in May, 1865, on the banks of the Saskatchewan. This was called St. Paul of the Crees, and had two resident priests. Each of these missionary stations had moreover a

⁵A circumscription proper to a religious or monastic organization, quite different from a vicariate-apostolic, which is created by the Pope and almost enjoys the rights of a full-fledged diocese.

certain number of outposts which were periodically visited by one of the fathers.

But the new vicar of missions could not immediately assume the supervision of those different posts. The season was too far advanced for him to reach his headquarters before the winter; he therefore stayed in France a few months after the chapter, employing himself in preaching and lecturing with a view to getting resources in men and money for his missions. He was highly successful, and returned to Canada not only with many boxes of goods therefor, but with five priests, two lay brothers and three or four postulant lay brothers. The priests were Fathers Légeard, Dupin, Fourmond, Doucet and Blanchet.

This apostolic caravan hailed the Red River with its saintly leader in the beginning of July, 1868. In addition to these precious recruits, all of whom were to persevere in their chosen field of labour, we should mention a no less valuable newcomer in the person of J. M. Camper, who had, two years before (October 13, 1865), come from France and joined the phalanx of evangelical labourers in the diocese of St. Boniface. He had immediately been stationed at St. Laurent, on Lake Manitoba, with Brother Mulvihil, who arrived a year later (December, 1867). The latter had accompanied Fathers Laity and De Kérangué, who were destined for the difficult missions of the Mackenzie.

As to the Ordinary^t of St. Boniface himself, he

felt the need of secular priests for the sedentary posts he intended to establish among his halfbreeds. With a view to recruiting some, his trusted friend, Mr. Ritchot, passed the winter of 1867-68 in eastern Canada. But when he returned to St. Boniface, July 7, 1868, he was accompanied by only one, Rev. Mr. L. Raymond Giroux, who was at once appointed professor of philosophy in the college, and missionary priest to St. Vital and Ste. Anne des Chênes, which he regularly visited once a week and once a month respectively.

As a result of the foregoing, we may state, by way of recapitulation, that in the fall of 1868 the Church was represented between Lake Superior and the Rocky Mountains, on the one hand, and from the American boundary to the North Pole, on the other, by four bishops (Taché, Grandin, Faraud and Clut, all Oblates), five secular priests, namely, Rev. Messrs. Thibault, Ritchot, Dugas, Kavanagh⁶ and Giroux, and no less than thirty-two Oblate missionaries, aided by a score or more of lay brothers. It counted moreover seven establishments of Grey Nuns, who taught school, brought up orphans, and kept asylums for the old and infirm. The work of the late Bishop Provencher was indeed progressing.

⁶Then acting as assistant to Vicar-General Thibault at St. François-Xavier.

APPENDIX A.

AS TO THE TIME OF THE LAKE OF THE WOODS MASSACRE.

In his valuable work on "The Search for the Western Sea" Lawrence J. Burpee has it (p. 245) that "an early start was made from the fort, and when they stopped for breakfast they had reached an island off what is now known as Oak Point." He then proceeds to mention the massacre there of the whole band, remarking by way of comment: "How the Sioux managed to surprise such a large party of experienced *voyageurs* can only be conjectured." We would be prepared to share the author's implied astonishment if we could be made to believe that the massacre took place in broad daylight as Burpee would have it. But we fail to find any authority for such a surmise in all the contemporaneous documents at our disposal. We believe we have consulted all the available sources of information dating from the period of the French explorations in Western Canada—Lavérendrye's memoirs, letters and journals, as well as those of De Beauharnois—and we repeat that we cannot find anything that would warrant Burpee's inference that the massacre took place in the morning.

That author evidently derived his data on this point from the published notes of Father Félix Martin, S.J., who says that "the explorers had reached the Lake of the Woods, and had landed on an island for the morning meal," when they were attacked by Sioux that had been prowling about ("The Aulneau Collection," p. 90). Where Father Martin got his information is more than we can say; but personally we have no doubt that he is mistaken. That priest wrote some thirty-five years ago, at a time when the researches made within the last few years had not yielded the wealth of contemporary documents now in our possession.

In the first place, he makes Father Aulneau come to Canada in 1730 instead of 1734, and says that he went west

six years later, that is, in 1736 instead of 1735. Then his notes on the subject are so worded that the inference comes naturally to the mind of the reader that the discoverer himself, the elder Lavérendrye, not his son, was in the party that fell on Massacre Island and that this party just hailed from the east, instead of coming from Fort St. Charles, in the west. Lastly, Father Martin plainly states that "some sought safety in flight only to perish in the waves," an assertion which is not borne out by subsequent happenings. On the 19th of September, 1736, the Sieur de Lavérendrye sent, according to his own memoir, "a sergeant with six men to take up the bodies of Rev. Father Aulneau and of [his] son." He then adds: "I have buried them in the chapel with *all* the heads of the French who have been slain." The discovery of Fort St. Charles (see Appendix B) has confirmed this statement, and the skulls of *all* the French voyageurs have lately come to light.

Furthermore, two considerations based on the ways of the voyageurs and the Indians combine to disprove the assertion that the Lake of the Woods massacre took place in the morning. In the first place we have the well-known cowardice and treachery of the American aborigines. It is inconceivable that the Sioux should have attacked and annihilated a body of twenty-one armed white men who could not help being aware of their approach if assailed by daylight. And then Lavérendrye is positive on the fact that the island on which they were massacred was seven leagues, or about twenty-one miles, from Fort St. Charles. Once on the way, voyageurs generally rose early and often covered some distance before breakfasting. But they were just as slow in leaving an inhabited place. Hence it is absolutely against all likelihood that Lavérendrye's men should have departed from their fort without eating and gone twenty-one miles before taking their first meal. Such a feat could scarcely be put to the credit of men who, as Father Martin wrongly supposes, were nearing the end of a long voyage: it is utterly incredible of voyageurs who merely started on an important journey.

APPENDIX B.

THE DISCOVERY OF FORT ST. CHARLES.

In the course of the long years that elapsed after the tragedy which we have related, even the very identity of the spots connected therewith had become so doubtful that when, shortly after his accession to the See of St. Boniface, Most Rev. L. P. A. Langevin, O.M.I., endeavoured to trace them out in an irrefragable manner, he met at first with great difficulties and temporary failure. Massacre Island was known to the local Indians as a spot to be shunned, though exactly for what reason they could not say, and the exact location of the slaying of Father Aulneau and companions is still a matter of conjecture. As to the site of Fort St. Charles, wherein they found a final interment, it had become a problem involved in deep mystery.

But this very circumstance only stimulated the new archbishop to leave no stone unturned until he had found it, and with it all that was left of the pioneer missionary and explorers. To this effect he organized and defrayed the expenses of a searching expedition composed of himself, Rev. J. B. Baudin, O.M.I., parish priest of Kenora, on the Lake of the Woods; Rev. Jos. Blain, S.J., of St. Boniface College; Revs. Chas. Cahill, O.M.I., Thibaudeau, O. M.I.; Rev. Mr. A. Bélieau, secretary to His Grace, and the Hon. Judge L. A. Prud'homme, to whom history owes much for the light he has shed on the French origins of the Canadian West.

Most of the members of the expedition left Winnipeg for the Lake of the Woods on September 1, 1902. Thanks to his knowledge of the native language, Father Cahill easily secured for the party the services of two Indian chiefs, who told him of the ruins of very old chimneys they had seen in their youth on the shores of a long inlet on the west side of the lake, a little to the west of Buckete Island and a promontory known as American point. After some

search, one of the chiefs called Powasson was not a little disconcerted at his failure to locate the stone mound which he had not seen for many years. Despairing of success, the exploring party had even embarked for their return home, when Father Thibaudeau, who had tarried in the bush and long grass of the shore, cried out that he had found something. On examination it was ascertained that the remnants of an old fireplace, square stones so laid as to form three sides of a quadrangle, attested the existence in the long ago of a chimney, and consequently of a building, which, in a first moment of enthusiasm, was proclaimed to have been the much wanted Fort St. Charles. Confidence in the traditions of the natives was thereby revived, and the excursionists left the place with the intention of completing the discovery at some future date.

In August, 1905, the same spot, as well as Massacre Island, were revisited by another party, headed by His Grace of St. Boniface and composed of five Oblates, one Jesuit, Judge Prud'homme and others. Some additional mounds were found and probed without leading to any serious results. Two years later, a similar expedition, formed of a like personnel, completed what was then believed to be the discovery of the fort by means of examinations, excavations and measurements which put in evidence the ruins of three chimneys, with a few metal objects such as a file, some nails and the blade of a knife.

These results, gratifying as they were, did not entirely satisfy Fathers Paquin, Cahill and others, as the nature of the soil and the general topography of the place did not seem to warrant the possibility in that locality of a palisaded post such as Fort St. Charles was known to have been. In the meantime, the enthusiasm which Mgr. Langevin had infused in the members of the various expeditions had led Judge Prud'homme to delve into the archives of the Paris Ministry of Marine, wherein valuable documents bearing on the real location of the establishment were found.

On July 10, 1908, another party, composed this time of Jesuits of St. Boniface College, repaired to the site already explored, armed with Prud'homme's documents, maps and the account of the labours of the previous expeditions, the

members of which had, as early as September 4, 1902, constituted themselves into the Historical Society of St. Boniface, now duly incorporated for the Province of Manitoba.

So far all the researches had been made on the north side of the inlet. One of the party, Rev. Father Paquin, having become incapacitated for work as a result of an accident, he utilized his enforced leisure in perusing the literature bearing on the subject. He then fell on the following passages of Judge Prud'homme's account of the 1902 expedition, which pointed to information furnished by Chief Powasson: "On the south shore, opposite the place where you have just planted a cross, there are also three chimneys"; and again: "These lay close to the shore in a small cove, amid a grove of aspens, a little to the west of the site on the north shore."

Having induced his companions to try that spot, Father Paquin was delighted to see them bring to light a mound of large stones, hidden from view by a heavy growth of good-sized trees, which attested the presence there, in years long past, of a large fireplace. Then, as a result of a methodical examination, two other smaller hearths were discovered, together with a number of metal objects. Next, a heap of human bones was unearthed north of the large fireplace, which could be made to form a dozen skeletons, evidently brought there for interment long after death. All the skulls were missing. The decayed remnants of the fort palisade were then located in the ground, which made the identity of the site a matter of certainty.

This much was accomplished in July, 1908. On August 5th of the same year, a new party composed of Rev. Mr. Bélieau, Judge Prud'homme, Fathers Blain, S.J., and Paquin, S.J., with three brothers of the same Society, made their way to the now undisputed Fort St. Charles. After one day of futile search the chapel of the establishment was located, and, to the inexpressible joy of the band of explorers, a large number of human skulls were unearthed. To quote Father Paquin ("The Discovery of the Relics of the Rev. J. P. Aulneau, S.J.", p. 499): "They were arranged in two double rows, lying in the clay under about two feet of earth, in a good state of preservation, with rootlets grown through the cavities of the eyes, ears,

and nose. They were duly counted and there were nineteen; one had an arrow point firmly imbedded in the lower jaw, and another arrow point was found loose in another skull."

On the third and fourth days of excavating, three skeletons were brought to light, of which one was that of a child, now partly obliterated. These proved to be the remains of Indians buried there without a coffin.

At last, in the most northerly part of the chapel site, the spade came in contact with the pulverized remnants of what had been a wooden box four feet by two "enclosing two skeletons lying side by side on the back, and without the skulls. . . . Both were cramped into such a small space that the bodies must have been in an advanced state of decomposition when placed in the box in which they were buried," a circumstance which tallies entirely with what we know of the death and burial of Aulneau and Lavérendrye. With one of the skeletons were found two keys, and, between the two, a pocket knife or razor. Three small arrow points were also resting on the vertebral column of the other, and toward its feet were found a bunch of five keys, a shoe buckle such as worn by ecclesiastics in France, and fourteen beads of a rosary. But what completed the identification of those remains was a deep cut, made seemingly by a dull-edged implement, which was observed in the sacrum of one of the skeletons, making it as incontestable that the bones of this were those of Lavérendrye's son as it was sure that those of the other were Father Aulneau's.

All the finds resulting from those expeditions are now treasured in St. Boniface College.

APPENDIX C.

THE RED RIVER VOYAGEUR.

By John G. Whittier.

Out and in the river is winding
The links of its long red chain,
Through belts of dusky pine land
And gusty leagues of plain.

Only at times a smoky wreath
With the drifting cloud-rack joins—
The smoke of the hunting lodges
Of the wild Assiniboines.

Drearly blows the north wind,
From the land of ice and snow;
The eyes that look are uneasy,
And heavy the hands that row.

And with one foot on the water
And one upon the shore,
The Angel's shadow gives warning—
That day shall be no more.

Is it the clang of the wild geese?
Is it the Indians' yell
That lends to the voice of the north wind
The tones of a far-off bell?

The voyageur smiles as he listens
To the sound that grows apace;
Well he knows the vesper ringing
Of the bells of St. Boniface.

The bells of the Roman Mission
That call from their turrets twain
To the boatman on the river,
To the hunter on the plain.

Even so in our mortal journey
The bitter north winds blow;
And thus upon Life's Red River
Our hearts, as oarsmen, row.

Happy is he who heareth
The signal of his release
In the bells of the Holy City,
The chimes of eternal peace.

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